

*THE SIGN  
OF THE  
WOODEN SHOON*



*Marshall Mather*



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# A FEW OPINIONS OF THE PRESS

ON

Mr. MARSHALL MATHER'S Work,

## 'Lancashire Idylls.'

*The BIRMINGHAM DAILY GAZETTE says :*

'It is one of the most charming books of folk-lore we have seen for many a day. It has been left to Mr. Mather to raise with loving tenderness and care an enduring memorial to the rude but kindly Lancashire cottars. Mr. Mather has drawn a series of delightful pictures of their life and surroundings. Every one of these pictures shows how admirably he was fitted for the task, and each bears the impress of a keen perception and acquaintance with the innermost life and feeling of the scenes he so vividly and picturesquely portrays. None of Lancashire's many talented sons have done her a truer service than Mr. Mather in handing down to posterity these altogether delightful sketches of peasant life in a corner of her wide-reaching borders.'

*The LIVERPOOL COURIER says :*

'It is a clean and wholesome book. It makes us ashamed of our "Second Mrs. Tanquerays," our "Tribbys," our "Women who Did," this and that other thing. This breath from the hills—the sweet scent of the wine-red moor—and the spectacle of white galleons floating in a sapphire sea, drawn with such vivid freshness straight from nature, must serve as a healthy corrective to all who avail themselves of its pages. Let it not be supposed that Mr. Mather deals with saints and angels. Far from it. His heroes and heroines are a rude, prejudiced, and erring set of beings. But it is the purpose of the work that makes the difference. That is ennobling as regards every page, and the touch is that of the true artist. Those who would elevate the human family must preserve the highest ideals. There is no other road to real progress. Such ideals abound in these genuine and beautiful "Lancashire Idylls."'

*The MANCHESTER CITY NEWS says :*

'This is a singularly interesting book. It ought to receive a cordial welcome in Lancashire and be widely read beyond the confines of the county. In general character it resembles, and in interest it quite equals, the sketches of Scottish humble life which have gained Mr. Barrie and "Ian Maclaren" great popularity south of the Tweed.'

*The COURT JOURNAL says :*

'Pathos and humour rub shoulders in Mr. Mather's book as they do in life itself, and the result is a curiously interesting piece of work. We should feel sorry for anyone who could read the exquisite sketch, "A Child of the Heather," with dry eyes, and the grim humour of "A Moorland Machpelah" is quite admirable. There are twenty delightful "Idylls" in the volume, not one of which fails to show either strength, tenderness, humour, or beauty, and we must refer our readers to the book itself as to something unconventional and fascinating.'

THE SIGN OF  
THE WOODEN SHOON.





# THE SIGN OF THE WOODEN SHOON.

BY

MARSHALL MATHER,

AUTHOR OF

'LANCASHIRE IDYLLS,' 'LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF JOHN RUSKIN,'

'POPULAR STUDIES IN NINETEENTH CENTURY POETS,'

ETC., ETC.



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THE LAST AND LATE BORN OF  
ELIJAH AND ASENATH.

- I. AFTERMATH.
- II. GOD DISPOSES.
- III. THE OPEN CAGE.
- IV. THE VIGIL OF DESPAIR.
- V. LITTLE SAMUEL'S SUBSTITUTE.

'It came up late in the spring,  
And bloomed at harvest time.  
The reaper wept as he gathered the shorn flower  
and bound it,  
With the ripened grain,  
In the sheaf of the Eternal.'

THE  
SIGN OF THE WOODEN SHOON.



I.

AFTERMATH.

THEY were sitting in the twilight, looking into the embers of the fire. A distraught air was upon them, and each waited for the other to break a silence both painful and long-continued.

The room was low-ceiled, and crossed with warped and worm-eaten beams. Cumbrous furniture filled up the spaces, and through a mullioned window fell the closing lights of day. A reign of quiet order, almost unhomely, rested on chair and settle, shelf and sill, broken by no misplaced trifle nor discounted by any trail of dust. She who ruled here was called by her

neighbours 'plaguy clean'—nor did they misname her, for, careful and troubled about much serving, she was never wearied of burnishing her household shrine.

Once upon a time little children kept her following at their toddling heels ; but this was years ago, and now they were fending for themselves in distant towns. For long the house had been silent ; and as time passed the mother became more the wife, and love of offspring was rivalled by pride of home.

But the angel of maternity was once more overshadowing her, and there was the late promise of one who should be a child of old age. Neither to Elijah nor to his wife Asenath was the messenger welcome, and more than once she had murmured she'd 'no mind to start life o'er agen.' They spoke little to one another about it, and sought to hold it secret from their neighbours. But the moons were telling their tale, and prying eyes, that no subterfuge could deceive, began to be suspicious, while curious tongues already wagged.

As the shadows lengthened, and the fire burned with the brightness of nightfall, the



faces of the silent sitters stood out in fitful relief. The man, who was spare and round-shouldered, preserved a kindly play of line about the eyes and mouth—a face, his, over which time had not tyrannized, yet not free from the veil so often thrown by a puritanic faith. The countenance of his wife was set in stronger cast. There was a straightness about the nose, and a compression in the lips, that told of strength and self-sufficiency; while all the sentiment of her nature was hidden away beneath the firm control, almost rigid and statuesque, of her immobile features. She was one of those stolid women who could fulfil her round of household labours, carry her burdens, hide her sorrows, and ask little from any, ever self-contained and strong. Her tongue was sharp, her wit drastic; though her approaching trouble had somewhat tamed these, holding her from many with whom she used to chat and chaff and rouse to merriment with her quaint moorland talk.

It was she who at last broke the silence. ‘Elijah,’ she said, ‘it’s no use; thaa mut as weel face up like a mon.’

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‘Aw durnd know as aw’ve faced up ony other road yet, lass,’ was his reply.

‘Yi! thaa has! Thaa’rt shamed o’er fotchin’ th’ kayther (cradle); but tha’ll have to fotch it, an’ to morn an’ o’, so thaa mut as weel mak up thi mind to ’t!’

‘Thaa shouldn’t ha’ gi’n th’ owd un away, lass.’

‘Naa, ’Lijah; durnd thee talk like a foo’ (fool). Who thought as aught o’ this sort wor baan to happen?’

‘There’s no knowin’ what’ll happen i’ this world,’ was his reply.

‘Durnd thee begin o’ thi wise talk wi’ me, ’Lijah. Aw’m noan i’ th’ humour for ’t, aw con tell thee. We’ll fiddle through th’ tune naa we’n started; and thaa’ll nobbud mend matters wur by sulkin’.’

‘Who is sulkin’, lass?’

‘Who’s sulkin’? doesto say! Why, thaa art. Thaa’s never opened thi maath but when thaa’s opened it to eyt sin’ thaa come whom’ (home).

‘Nay, lass. Aw’m noan so bad as thaa mak’s aat. Aw’m a bit worried abaat thee; thaa’rt

noan so young as thaa used to be, thaa knows.'

'It's th' kayther thaa wants to bother thi yed abaat, an' noan me. Aw con shap (manage) if thaa'll do as thaa'rt toud. Thaa'll have to go to th' city to-morn, and fotch a kayther—and a gradely one and o'. Doesto yer?'

Elijah never dreamed of disobeying the orders of his wife ; once uttered they were irrevocable, and he knew it. From her first hint as to the purchase of the cradle, he saw what his task would be, and made up his mind to its performance. Yet he shrank from the ridicule that would follow. He knew how his neighbours would watch him, prying into the purpose of his journey, looking out for his return, and joking him as to his burden. And, as in imagination he went through the duties of the morrow, the perspiration stood out on his brow, and for the first time in his life he felt himself just a bit of a coward.

'Well, lass,' continued Elijah, after another pause, 'aw suppose aw mun do as thaa wants me, but aw's go by th' furst train and come back by th' last, or aw's have o' th' village after me.'

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‘Thaa can do as thaa’s a mind, so long as thaa brings th’ kayther wi’ thee.’ And so saying, this hard-headed daughter of the hills rose from her chair and lighted the lamp. Then, drawing a basket towards her, she sat down to sew at some articles of baby dress.

On the following morning Elijah, in his ‘Sunday best,’ hurried off, shyly and in trepidation, to the station, commissioned by his relentless wife for the purchase of a nest wherein the new-comer was to lay its unwelcome head. As he hastened through the deserted street he thought of his trip on a like errand years before, when, with a light heart and merry tongue, he set out to provide for the advent of his first-born. He remembered how merrily he sang as he journeyed, and how proud he was to let the neighbours know what he was fetching. It was then the hour of a great delight to him ; but now his feet were heavy and his heart sad—as his wife put it, ‘he fair shamed, though he’d no need to.’

Careful as he was to seek escape from detection, the neighbours were too keen for him, watching his departure and speculating as to his

errand. Observant eyes pierced the dull light of morning, and as he passed to the station surmise did not slumber.

‘Where’s ’Lijah baan this mornin’, donn’d i’ his Sunday best?’ asked Matty o’ Sals.

‘Thaa’d better ax him thysel’. There’s no speakin’ to him an’ his missis naa-a-days—they’re fit to bite folk yeds off.’ This comment was passed by an old man—an itinerant clock-mender, who was known as ‘Tic-tak.’

‘They are, forshure. ’Lijah used to be a daycent sort; but he’s held his yed daan latly, as though he’d done summit wrang, as they say.’

‘Him an’ th’ wife have been terrible close o’ late,’ continued Matty o’ Sals. ‘If they’d a murderer shut up i’ th’ hoile (house), they couldn’t keep more to theirsels.’

‘It’s noan a murderer they’ve getten’ shut up, lass,’ said the old woman, with a knowing look—‘is it, Tic-tak?’

Tic-tak declared he knew ‘naught abaat it,’ as he had never been ‘axed to fettle Elijah’s clocks for th’ last six months,’ assuring the gossips that ‘all maks (kinds) o’ mischief might tak’ place in that time.’

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'Aw would like to know what he's gone for,' continued Matty o' Sals, fretting in the meshes of curiosity. 'He's noan i' sich high feather abaat it, whatever it is.'

'Thaa'rt reight, lass. He looks more like a chap that's baan to swing, nor a chap as owns a clog-shop.'

'It tak's summat beside brass to sweeten porritch,' philosophized Tic-tak. 'Yon wife's tung of his 'ill bide some treacle, aw warnd' (warrant).

'But aw would like to know whod he's gone for,' persisted Matty.

'Summat thaa's no use for, lass,' said the old woman; 'so thaa's no need to bother thi yed.'

Matty of Sals was a spinster. And yet all through the day she fretted to know the errand of Elijah; while the talk of the gossips was of his morning's departure and mission to the city beyond the hills.

On reaching the station, Elijah sought out a compartment in which he could travel alone; but as the train was moving, two friends jumped in and sat down at his side.

‘Mornin’! Baan to th’ city?’ one of them asked.

Elijah nodded his head.

‘Arto baan a-buyin’ more leather, then?’

Elijah nodded the lie he dared not utter.

‘Aw thought as thaa’d bought thi leather last month,’ said the second of his travelling companions. ‘Hasto used it all?’

‘Nowe,’ answered Elijah; ‘aw’ve a bit laft.’

‘Let’s see! Who doesto get thi leather of, ’Lijah? Smithson’s, isn’t it?’

‘Yi!’ was Elijah’s only response.

‘Well, aw want a bit o’ leather misel’ to-day. If thaa doesn’d mind, aw’ll go wi’ thee. Aw could like to open an account wi’ Smithson’s. Happen thaa’d say a word for me?’

Elijah groaned, and said he’d a ‘two-three arrands to do for t’ misses’ afoore he could go to the leather-merchant’s, ‘an’ they mut excuse him like.’

‘Thy misses hasn’t bin so weel latly, has hoo, ’Lijah?’ questioned the first of the two speakers.

‘Nowe, hoo hasn’t. Aw’ll tell yo’ what, lads—it’s some hot i’ this shop; let’s have th’ winder

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daan a bit ;' and Elijah took off his hat and wiped his reeking brow.

'Hot, doesto say? Why, mon, its freezin', an' a yest wind blowin' an' o'.'

'Daan wi' that winder,' cried Elijah, 'or aw'st faint.'

The man spoken to jerked the strap, and let the window fall into its slide with a bang, a cold gust of air sweeping round the carriage and scattering the icy particles carried in from the moors.

'Aw think tha mun a gotten a touch o' fayver, 'Lijah.'

'Yi! Aw think aw mun; aw've noan felt weel latly.'

'Then, there's two on yo' bad at your haase—th' misses an' yor'sel', lad?'

At this juncture of the conversation the train began to slow down, and the compartment filled, relieving Elijah from the close questioning of his inquiring friends, and giving him a chance to regain his normal temperature.

Throughout the whole of that day Elijah trod the city streets like a haunted man, thinking



himself dogged and shadowed, and the focus of all eyes. How he dragged through its hours he never afterwards knew, wandering from place to place, seeing nothing, and being constantly saluted by friends, yet showing no sign of recognition. Only the terror of disobedience when back again in the presence of his wife forced and nerved him to make his purchase—empty-handed he dared not return. This fear alone overcame his foolish shame, or, rather, that which his foolish shame would have had him neglect.

On his homeward journey, however, he was possessed of saner mind, his religion and superstition mastering his cowardice and folly. He began to remember how his faith taught him that children were a heritage from the Lord ; and he wondered, in his simplicity, if his attitude was not one of defiance to Him whom he feared. Then he grew uneasy as he called to mind, from the Bible he knew so well, instances of dire punishment for rebellion and ingratitude such as those in which he had indulged. From the same old book he also called to mind how late-born children had often been famous—sacred,

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and set apart for great callings—and also how parentage in old age was a sign of Divine approval. Isaac, Samuel, John, were all late-born, and all famous ; Abraham, Elkanah, and Zacharias were all parents in their old age. Thus he laid, in his rude religious fashion, a flattering unction to his soul, which eased the shame he had so long nursed, and rebuked his folly.

Then the power of his puritanic faith asserted itself, and pride—spiritual pride—entered into his heart. Was he not a chosen vessel? and might there not spring from him a prophet of the highest? He worshipped Abraham's God ; could he not claim Abraham's promise? And as the train rattled on through the dark night, shrieking and roaring over the moorland wastes and through the gorges, Elijah knelt down on the hard floor of the compartment, and, under the dim flicker of the sweating lamp, asked the God of little children to forgive his selfishness and shame, dedicating the child of his old age to the Eternal Father, who said : 'Suffer them . . . for of such is My kingdom.'

'Heather—low! Heather—low!'

It was the cry of the night-porter, and as the

train drew up at the platform Elijah sprang out, and almost ran with what was now no longer a burden, but a treasure. The neighbours were as good as their word—they were watching for him. But the night was kindly, and in the darkness they failed to discover what he bore under his arm. The porter at the station saw, however, and that night told his wife, and she, in her excitement, whispered the secret to her next-door neighbour, who in her turn proclaimed it from the housetops—or, rather, from the house-steps—so that in twenty-four short hours all Heatherlow knew why Elijah had donned ‘his Sunday best’ and gone to the city.

‘Naa, lass! will it do?’ asked Elijah, after removing the sheets of brown paper in which the domestic ark was wrapped, and showing to his wife a bassinette, lined with pink, and trimmed with white muslin.

‘Yi,’ said his partner, ‘thaa’s managed not to make a foo’ o’ thisel’ this time.’

‘Durnd thee be so sure abaat that, lass.’ And then he told her how he had nodded the lie about the leather to his companions in the

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train, and asked to have the window down, despite the winter's wind, and all because he 'shamed o' bein' a faither i' his owd age.'

'Ey dear, 'Lijah! thaa wor awlus short o' wit. Thee an owd mon! why, thaa'rt noan fifty yet, an' aw'm eight year younger nor thee.'

'Nowe — but thaa forgets we'n had no childer for fifteen year!'

'An aw think 'ut thaa forgets aw wor wed when aw wor seventeen. Doesto remember haa folk cried shame on thee for marryin' a bit ov a lass like me?'

'Aw remember. But it wor th' best day's wark aw ever did i' mi life, Asenath.'

'Thaa'rt reight, 'Lijah, it wor. Aw durnd know what thaa'd a' done wi' thisel' but for me.'

Then Elijah lighted his pipe, and, drawing his chair to the fire, told his wife about the prayer put up by him in the railway-train, and how he had 'told th' Almeety that if it were a lad, it had to be a prophet like Samuel an' John th' Baptist.' And how he believed it would be a lad, and how he would 'tak' it up to th' chapel,' and 'eddicate it,' and send it to

college and 'shap' it for a parson.' And as he talked, his wife raised her apron to eyes filled with tears, and the mother's heart once more began to beat, and the instinct of former years at last arose and welcomed the coming advent.

'But thaa knows, 'Lijah, we cornd mak th' child a parson.'

'Nowe, lass; but we con eddicate him, and mak a scholard on him.'

'Yi; but it's noan eddication, it's grace, thaa knows, 'ut makes a parson, an' noather thee nor me can give th' child that.'

'But there's a deal o' parsons as hasn't mich grace, lass.'

'There is so,' replied his wife, as she watched the smoke curl from his lips and pipe.

'There is so—a deal o'er mony for mi likin'!'

'What arto smilin' at, 'Lijah?' asked his wife in the old sharp tone of voice.

'Naught mich, lass.'

'Come, naa, I'm baan to know what it is that's tickled thee.'

'Why, happen it willn'd be a lad.'

'Lad or lass, it'll be welcome. Theer'll noan be "one too mony" at aar haase. Him as sends

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childer can mak hearts big enough for all as He sends.'

But it was a lad—'a fine, strappin' lad,' the neighbours called it, and for many a week the talk and wonder of the countryside. The cradle, the purchase of which cost Elijah so much, stood all the summer-tide in the cottage doorway, flooded with the sunlight, in which the little one kicked and crowed. Many a time a day the mother turned aside from her household toil to croon her love bits over the open-eyed, rosy-faced babe, who in return prattled responsive messages in sounds known only to mothers and watching angels. In the eyes of Elijah it was the most wonderful of babies, and he was never weary of declaring that 'its yed (head) wor made for knowledge, and its maath for talkin'.' Then came the day of its dedication, when the minister sprinkled it, and gave to it the name of Samuel, and in his prayer besought the Almighty that He would early call the child, and keep him ever in the temple courts. As time passed, and he grew, he was carried across the road to his father's shop, where he would sit with dreamy gaze on the blue

of the sky, or the purple of the moors, now toying with bits of leather, or learning the vernacular of the village from the gossips who gathered to talk round the clogger's stool. The presence of the child became a centre of new life ; in his opening light and intelligence Elijah renewed his youth and cherished a future for his name. At the home, too, it was again springtide—walls, long silent, echoed, and rooms, across the floors of which the little feet so long had ceased to patter, resounded once more beneath their beat. There was a going back to old life—a rejuvenescence ; and often would Elijah with a choking voice say : ‘ There's naught like a little un for keepin' folk young.’ Thus it was that Samuel — or Sam'l, as they called him—grew and waxed strong, and was known for miles as the child of Elijah and Asenath's old age.

## II.

### GOD DISPOSES.

ELIJAH HOLT was the village clogger—in other words, he made and repaired the wooden-soled foot-gear of the factory operatives and quarrymen who, with a few grass farmers, constituted the scattered population of the moorland parish of Heatherlow.

The shop in which he worked was gloomy, save when bars of afternoon sunshine fell through its dusty window ; while the cheerlessness of its whitewashed walls knew no relief but what was gained from the torn engravings of teetotal orators cut out by Elijah from temperance papers and pasted in irregular rows—a gallery of worthies the clogger most revered.

And yet this shop was the great rendezvous of village gossip. The first fall of Elijah's



hammer was the beat that summoned the devotees of news to their local shrine ; and in and out they passed until the hammer ceased. Old men would group round the counter, and weave out of the smoke-wreaths from their pipes reminiscences of former days ; while children stole in to beg tatchin-end and cobbler's wax, and bits of leather for their 'suckers'—little pleaders, these, whom Elijah never turned away. Farmers, too, carried in odds and ends of romance from the hills, and stray wanderers from distant townships told how the world wagged beyond the moors. Reports, startling, and sometimes destructive, had their birth and confirmation in Elijah's shop, and many a time did a multitude of fertile minds create that baseless fabric called 'they say so.' The curious, too, would whisper what they heard elsewhere in Elijah's ear, to receive the seal of truth or denial. Indeed, the clogger's shop answered the end of post-office and newspaper, messages being left there until called for, while Elijah talked his leading article morning by morning over his clogs, when whosoever would might stand and hear. There was always a weather chart—or

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what answered the same end—and a verbal list of births, deaths, and marriages. Now and again a rich story was told—oftener a joke—not over-fine in its grain. Indeed, the life and spirit of the whole countryside was focussed in Elijah's shop; life, ideal and real, imaginative, exaggerated, and true.

It was Monday morning, and Elijah was singing a hymn in welcome both of his labour and of the light. He had on the previous day, to use his own words, been 'a full-timer,' which, translated into English, meant attendance at all the services of the little chapel on the hill. There was a cheery look on the clogger's face, and a nimble movement in his limbs—a man electric with the spirit of his religion and with the spirit of the springtide that breathed its freshness from the outlying moors. He had risen early, and his prayers still haunted the chamber in which he left his sleeping wife and boy. Ah, that boy!—'little Sam'l,' as he called him—he was never out of his thoughts. By day he worked for his education—for was he not to go to college, and be a parson? By night he dreamed of him and his future. As he lay

awake, looking out into the darkness, how often he pictured him in the pulpit of some great church, and then the silent hours would ring melodious with a voice eloquent as that of an angel's. Since the boy's advent Elijah had lived in another world—a world in which a little child was leading.

It was Monday morning, and Elijah was busy at his work. Despite the open door and the fresh moorland breeze that wafted through, the shop was odorous of wax and stale dubbing. Worn-out clogs were piled in distant corners, and chips and leather shavings lay strewn across the floor. A rude counter divided the entrance from the window before which Elijah sat—a counter across which the operatives passed their damaged shoon, and across which they received them 'neatly repaired' or mended. At one end stood a stack of wooden blocks, shaped into arched soles; while bevelled iron, in malleable lengths, hung from the ceiling, in its turn to be cut and nailed to the wooden soles, and so lend durance in the busy wear of life.

'Hello, 'Lijah! Aught fresh?' The voice

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was thick, and sounded as from a bibulous throat.

‘Not as aw know on, Yeb (Edmund); nobbud hard wark, and plenty on’t.’

‘And plenty at th’ end on’t an’ o’, aw warnd (warrant). But that’s naught fresh to th’ likes o’ thee, ’Lijah.’

‘Happen not, Yeb; but it is to th’ likes o’ *thee*.’ And the speaker looked up from the clog over which he was stooping, and, wiping the sweat from his brow, gave his interlocutor a knowing nod.

At this good-humoured retort, Yeb put on an injured air, and said :

‘’Lijah, thaa’rt a foo’! It’s time thaa began o’ straightenin’ that back o’ thine. If thaa doesn’d, them as lays thee aat ’ill do it for thee. An’ thaa’ll ha to stop then, thaa knows, for owd Solomon says as there’s no wark i’ th’ grave.’

‘Bless thee, lad! that’s just why I’m a full-timer naa;’ and Elijah bent again to his clog.

‘There’s not mich sense i’ thi reason, ’Lijah! Gi’me time to look raand a bit, an’ see what’s sturrin’.’

‘An’ a deal thaa sees wi’ thi lookin’ raand. Aw bet aw see more at mi wark nor thaa sees at thy lakin’ (playing or idling).’

‘Well, thaa sees, thaa has th’ plesur o’ savin’, an’ aw hav th’ plesur o’ spendin’. It’s th’ way a chap’s shapped. There’s some as tak’s to wark as ducks tak’ to watter. But aw’m noan taken that road misel’.’

‘Aw durnd think thaa art, lad. An’ there’s a deal more o’ thi feshion.’

‘What arto baan to do wi’ thi brass, ‘Lijah?’

‘Eddicate Sam’l.’

‘But supposin’ he dees?’

‘Supposin’ what?’ asked Elijah, looking up from his work, a pale shade coming upon his face.

‘Suppose th’ lad dees—whod then?’

‘Why should he dee, Yeb?’

‘Nay, thaa mun ax th’ owd leveller that. Aw durnd know as he’s ony more particular abaat thi lad nor mine. An’ thaa knows mine had to go.’

‘Yi, he had, forsure,’ said Elijah, as though talking to himself, and lighting on an idea that never before occurred to him.

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‘Aw’ll tell thee whod it is, ’Lijah—a felley’s a foo’ ’ut plays providence to his childer.’

Elijah was silent, for a great weight lay at his heart. The springtide charm had gone; the sun was down, and darkness overwhelmed him. Then there stole over him the shadow of foreboding—an indefinite ill that seemed to draw near and seat itself at his side. He had planned much; and all was for Samuel. No detail, as far as he knew, was overlooked. And now there was the possibility that the scheme of years might collapse. He saw, for the first time, the fearful contingency of death.

‘Thaa’rt baan to mak’ a parson on him, arn’d ta, ’Lijah?’ asked Yeb, breaking the silence.

Elijah nodded.

‘Doesn’d ta think there’s too mony o’ that breed a’redy?’

‘Thaa cornd have too mich of a good thing, thaa knows,’ answered Elijah, brightening.

‘Well, thaa sees, aw look at it i’ this road. Parsons is noather use nor ornament; they do naught, an’ they’re naught mich to look at; they awlus look as if they wor baan to a berryin’ (funeral).’

‘But they preych, Yeb!’

‘Yi, for brass! But what’s preychin’? It’s noan producin’. There’s summat at th’ end of a clog, thaa knows; but there’s naught at th’ end of a sarmon.’

‘But didn’t Paul say ‘at th’ foolishness o’ preychin’ were to save th’ world?’

‘Well, aw’ll tell thee what my idea o’ salvation is, ‘Lijah. It’s summat to eat and summat to wear. Thaa mak’s clogs an’ keeps folk feet warm, and thaa’d better let Sam’l do th’ same. He’ll mak’ more folk happy nor he will wi’ sarmons.’

‘Thaa sees, Yeb, thaa’s never shared th’ plesur o’ religion.’

‘Nowe; but aw know what th’ plesurs o’ warm feet are in cowl weather. Clogs afoore sarmons, ony day.’

‘Why not have ‘em both, Yeb?’

‘Thaa’ll do as thaa likes, aw suppose, ‘Lijah; bnt aw’m agen eddication. Didto yer what Jone o’ th’ Clough Yed said to th’ vicar t’other day?’

Nay, what wor it he said?’

‘Why, th’ vicar axed him haa it wor as a rich

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mon like him didn'd send his lad to boardin' scoo'; and th' owd chap said becose he didn'd want his lads to come whom an' tell him haa to eyt his baggin' (dinner), an' haa to shap his maath when he talked.'

'There's happen summat in it. But aw'm noan feard o' Sam'l—bless him!'

At this juncture a milk-cart drove up to the door of the clogger's shop; and, looking up, Elijah saw young Jim o' th' Heights getting down from between his cans, decked out in his best, and on his way to the May Day show at Dene.

'Aw've called to fotch Sam'l, 'Lijah! He mut as weel go wi' me to th' show.'

'Thaa mun ax th' misses, lad—you'll find her an' th' child i' th' haase.'

'Aw'll tell thee whod, 'Lijah: there's a terrible deal o' milk-carts knockin' abaat nowadays,' said Yeb, as soon as Jim had turned his back. 'When aw wor a lad, we'd to fotch aar own milk, an' then it were nobbud blue.'

'Competition, thaa sees.'

'Nay, that's just what aw durnd see. It's



noan competition—it's fancy stomachs. Folk durnd know what they want naa. Why, aw never tasted tay whol aw were seven-an'-twenty. An' aw shouldn't ha' tasted then, but mi aunt Martha deed, and mi uncle geet some for th' berryin'. Aw mind as we supped hawve on it, an' t'other hawve wor put awaa i' a canister on th' chimbley-piece till th' owd felley deed hisel', ten year after ; and then we supped what wor laft o'er him, Aw'll tell thi whod, 'Lijah: aw'll back ale and oatmeal agen tay and mouffins ony day.'

'If thaa'd supped less ale and more tay, Yeb, thaa'd ha' had more brass i' thi pocket than thaa has,' replied Elijah.

'Sithee, 'Lijah,' said Yeb, 'as long as aw live aw'm baan to put th' best as aw con pay for into my inside—aw'm baan to treat it like a gentleman, aw con tell thi.'

The conversation was interrupted by Jim o' th' Heights, who now came over the road from Elijah's house, bearing in his arms the lad Samuel, who, donned in his Sunday clothes, carried a little whip in his hand, his face one glow of excitement at the anticipated drive, and

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May Day show at Dene. Kissing his doting parent, he was placed securely between the shining milk-cans, followed, as he rattled away, by Elijah's paternal injunction, 'Be sure thaa tak's care on him, Jim;' in response to which Jim waved and cracked his whip, crying out in mirthful tones: 'O' reight; aw'll look after him, 'Lijah.'

It was May Day after the fashion of the olden time—a warm sun, a clear sky, a bounty of flowers, and throngs of merry-voiced holiday-makers. As Jim drove along the road, shadowed by the bright greenery of early spring foliage, the little mare, fresh from a week's stabling and corn, stepped out friskily, pricking her ears at the shouts of the boisterous pedestrians, and starting aside at the sound of distant bands. Though Jim held a tight rein, the pace out-distanced that of other traps and conveyances travelling towards the show; and not a few of the more timid and more cautious prophesied, as he dashed past them, a spill.

On entering the town the crowd became more dense, a network of vehicles, with their

gaily-decked horses, winding through the concourse of sightseers like a many-coloured thread. At this the mare grew restive; when, in the throng of the excitement, a prize band struck up a national air with the full accompaniment of its brass instruments, the blare of which fired the overstrained animal with the madness of fright.

In a moment the crowd parted—parted as the sea before the magic rod of the Hebrew leader; and a line of clearance lay along the whole length of street.

Jim carried a cool head and a steady hand, holding the frenzied brute well under the guidance of the rein. Without a hitch he threaded his way amidst the retreating crowd, winding through the intricacies of its rapidly formed path with consummate skill.

But dangers were ahead. Right before him, and blocking his path, was the big lamp with which, save for a miracle, he must collide. For once, however, Providence was on the side of horsemanship, and he rounded the post, though for upwards of thirty yards the cart was carried at a precipitate angle and on one wheel alone.

Then came the bridge—an old-world bridge—a bridge rising from the road with sudden gradient, and narrowing towards its crown, to descend with sudden declivity on the farther side. Jim saw it, and saw that he must face it, and, biting his blanched lips, prepared to steer between the parapet, and keep the feet of his mare on the terrible descent beyond.

‘Sam’l,’ said Jim, as cool as though he were selling milk in the village street, ‘Sam’l! howd on to th’ cart-side.’

Like a flash the horse mounted the brow, clearing the closing walls by a hair’s-breadth, then, swift as thought, swept down the declivity into the road below.

A great roar went up from the crowd; but it was a roar that lent speed to the spanking pace at which the horse was going, and a hundredfold increased the risks.

There now lay before them a mile of road—straight and level—but leading into a highway along which steam-trams from neighbouring towns travelled with their cumbrous engines and heavily freighted cars. Jim’s quick, cool wit told him that, this highway cleared, all was

well; for he knew he could easily wind his horse on the miles of road beyond. But what if they collided—trap and tram? What if they clashed with steel and steam? There was just the off chance. And Jim's heart leapt, and for a moment a suffocating hand was at his throat. Then he grew strong as he remembered the chances were in his favour. There was the child, too—the trembling child at his side; was he not the Lord's child—a child of many prayers—one over whom the angels had charge? Surely no harm would come nigh him! So Jim reasoned in his onward flight.

But who knoweth the mind of Providence? and who dare gauge the future from its little-known laws? There was a blinding crash, a singing sound in the ears of Jim, a writhing horse netted in iron wheels, an overturned cart, and under it 'the Lord's child,' little Sam'l!

Throughout the golden hours of that May Day the chill shadow of foreboding haunted Elijah. He saw no sun, he scented no breath of flowers. The old hymns that changed his labour into praise were left unsung; even his

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hand forsook its cunning, and he threw down his clogs in despair. Ill at ease, he set out to walk to Dene ; but the shadow followed, still whispering evil tidings. He sought to banish it, but could no more do so than he could banish the shadow of the trees under which he walked ; nor could he silence its voice of dark prophecy. With swift recurrence he found himself asking, '*Is it well with the child ?*' And the answer of the shadow was always the same—'The child is dead.' Then Elijah reasoned with the shadow. He told it that Providence watched over the children of promise. He told it that the expected never happened. He told it, too, that little ones lived charmed lives in the midst of danger, yet only received for response the shadow's closer companionship. Then old Yeb's words, spoken in the morning, began to beat a torturing refrain in his ears—'*A felley's a foo' 'ut plays providence to his childer.*' Time and time again they rang their changes—wild music, nay, deadly discords, knelled from the shadowy land.

In the distance, as he journeyed, rose a ridge of hills, a dark cloud shrouding their summits,

as though a pall were spreading over the valley beyond, where lay the little town of Dene. As Elijah raised his eyes to the gloomy vapour, tongues of flame shot out at him as though to mock him, and mutterings of thunder fell on his ear. Then he saw forms emerge from the darkness and hurry out of the cloud—forms wild in their movements and wild in their cries. On they came, nearer and yet nearer, when, on seeing him, they paused ; nor did they move until he stood by them, reading in their faces the story their sealed lips could not tell.

As Elijah stood by little Samuel as he lay, white and unconscious, in the chamber of the Ram Inn, feeling and thought forsook him. Then there was borne in on him, slowly and vaguely at first, the fact that he had lost in the game so carefully and religiously played—a game in which he had backed Providence against the exigences of life. He had staked all on the boy, built up defences for his safety, and planned pastures for his feet—and the defences were proved vain, and the pastures blighted. Nay, more : he had invoked the care of God,

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and put in a claim for what the people at the little chapel called 'the promises,' which were Yea and Amen to them that believe. And this was the end of all. Better the lad should die than ever live to preach what Elijah now believed to be a lie. So he vaguely reasoned in the half-lights that were beginning to fall on his soul.

And while Elijah thus stood, and his wife was being hurried to his side, groups of neighbours gathered round the clogger's shop at Heatherlow, and among them 'owd Yeb,' who vociferously declared, times often, that '*A felley's a feo' 'ut plays providence to his childer.*'



### III.

#### THE OPEN CAGE.

IT was after many weary weeks of suffering that 'little Sam'l' was brought back, a hopeless cripple, to his father's house at Heatherlow. The skill of doctors at the great infirmary had been in vain: the spine was injured, and the lower part of the child's body paralyzed. Besides this, the boy was forced to wear what the neighbours called 'irons'—a network of steel that clasped his frail frame and yielded artificial support. He was subject, too, to sudden relapses, when the heart would beat low and the drawn face take a more deathly pallor. Of these, the doctors warned Elijah and his wife, for in one of them, they said, the boy might die. Poor lad! he was a hideous wreck—a

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parody of the once beautiful child, whose light had brightened the old home. But he lived, and, as his father used to say, 'if he wor nobbud theer to look at, it wor summat.' And yet Elijah dared not let his eyes rest too long on the little cripple, nor dare he look too long on children perfect in limb, lest pangs of resentment plagued him. Elijah's religion had also suffered shock, and now he seldom found his way to the chapel on the hill. The truth was—his faith had fallen with the fall of his child. There were some who said he was an infidel. This was idle talk, however, for no infidelity could hold up its head in the atmosphere where little Sam'l lived. True, the boy would never be a preacher now—that is, as the gaping world counts preaching; yet all through the day his quaint talk and quiet contentment were eloquent as the speech of heaven, and told their tale on the hearts of many of the gossipers at 'the Sign of the Wooden Shoon.'

One day Owd Tic-tak came into the shop with a cage, a smile broadening his wrinkled face, and saying :

'Sithee, Sam'l, aw've brought thee a brid

(bird). It'll sing for thee, thaa knows, and keep thi heart up when thaa'rt daan like. There's naught like a bit o' music—is ther, 'Lijah?'

'It's noan so mich i' mi line naa, Tic-tak,' sighed Elijah ; 'my singin' days are o'er ;' and he cast a sorrowful look at the boy, who now held the cage on his knee, eyeing the bird with tenderness and delight.

'Then thaa con let th' brid take thi place. Because thaa's gi'en o'er thysel', it doesn'd go as thaa should stop th' mouth o' Nature. Here, Sam'l, lend me th' cage, an' aw'll hang it i' th' sunleet ;' and, reaching out, he fastened the warbler in the doorway.

In a little while a low sweet note came from the bird—timorous and tentative ; then, as though gaining confidence, the trial was repeated, and followed by a succession of rapturous sounds, that brought a light of joy into the pale face of the crippled boy.

'Better nor yore long metres, 'Lijah—isn't it, lad?'

Elijah nodded his head, a movement on his part indicative of indefiniteness of reply.

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‘ Long metres an’ long faces, ’Lijah, aw mak’ naught o’ oather on ’em.’

‘ Some folk have enough to mak’ their faces long, Tic-tak, aw con tell thee. Wait whol sorrow’s pool’d thine a bit, an’ then we’ll see haa thaa looks i’ a potograf.’

‘ It’s pool’d aboon a bit, ’Lijah. Aw’ve four on ’em i’ th’ churchyard yon ; an’ that’s a big slice aat of a chap’s life, aw con tell thi. An’ thaa’s to berry thi first yet.’

The rapturous song of the bird here drowned the conversation, and struck a note of contrast to the minor chord into which it had so suddenly fallen. Then they held their peace to listen, while the boy’s eyes were fixed with fascination on the songster.

In a moment he turned towards his father, and said : ‘ Aw’ll tell yo’ what, dad. Th’ brid’s o’ reight, if it is as ill off as me. If it cornd get away fro’ it cage, it sings all th’ same.’

‘ What doesto mean, Sam’l? Thaa’rt i’ no cage.’

‘ Ammat aw just? What do yo’ call this?’ and the boy moved restlessly in the iron frame that supported his twisted limbs.

‘Th’ lad has some wit, an’ no mistak’,’  
muttered Tic-tak. ‘An’ aw durnd know as  
aw’d swop places wi’ him noather, if I wor  
th’ owd songster.’

And so the days passed, the sad father seeking to sweat away his sorrow by the oblivious antidote of toil, his boy the while seated at his side, ever fraying the sore with questions and conversation that betrayed powers and parts now for ever wrecked by the paralysis that held him prisoner in his iron cage.

The hand of the destroyer worked apace ; and throughout Samuel’s thirteenth year it was plain to all eyes, save those of the hope-blinded father, that the little life was well-nigh spent. His visits to the shop were now over, and Elijah had to work alone. These were dreary days—days of loneliness and gloom—days in which the hours dragged with leaden feet ; while the evenings at home, when father and son sat by the fire, fled with the swiftness of the told tale. Then it was Samuel would talk in dreamy mood, as one who saw through

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the ever-wearing texture called 'the veil'; while Elijah replied in tones of forced gaiety, that grew out of his intoxicated and blind parental love.

It was an afternoon in June, and Elijah was in the shop alone, securing the leather uppers to the wooden sole of a clog. Nothing disturbed the silence of the dreamy hour save the 'tap-tap' of the clogger's hammer and the wild music of the caged bird. Suddenly the hammer ceased, and, looking up, Elijah said :

'It's as Owd Tic-tak sez—there's naught like a bit o' music at after all. Go it, owd brid ; it fair mak's a felley leetsome (cheerful) to yer thee. Worchin' (working) to music is better nor worchin' for brass ony day ;' and the 'tap-tap-tap' of the hammer, as it fell on the leather upper, was once more carried out on the sultry air of the summer afternoon.

As if Elijah's moralizing were taken for an encore, there came from the throat of the bird another voluptuous burst of song.

'God bless thee ! thaa's a deal more sense nor some folk as is awlus i' th' dumps. Thaa wakens th' sun i' th' mornin' ; and when he

willn'd show his face, thaa mak's sunleet wi' thi song.'

And once more the notes rose in clearness and swelled in sweetness, until the village street palpitated with the cadences of the bird's music.

'Aw'll tell thee what, owd songster: aw wouldn't be perticular to swop places wi' thee — cage an o'. They say as singin' shows a leet heart—an' thaa'rt at it o' day long.'

Again the song arose, and the close shop was tremulous with the rapture of the imprisoned minstrel.

'Ey dear! who wouldn't be a brid i' this world? As Tic-tak sez, aw used to be a bit o' a singer misel' once; but there's naught to sing abaat naa.' And Elijah raised the corner of his leather apron and wiped a tear from his fast-filling eye; then, pulling himself together, and swallowing his sob, he said: 'But its no use bein' a poor plucked un. Here goes;' and clearing his throat, he struck up to a well-known tune the old words:

'My God, the Spring of all my joy,  
The Life of my delight.'

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Then, suddenly pausing, he said in muttered tones: 'But aw hav noan! Nowe—no joy for me naa!' and he once more bent to his task at the clog with an almost vindictive fierceness.

As though to rebuke him, the bird again took up the strain and volumed forth its song.

'Thaa's no tears to smoor (smother) thy song, thaa sees. An', then, thaa cornd help thisel'; thaa wor made to sing.'

'Thaa'rt doin' a deal o' talkin' to thisel', 'Lijah, aw think.'

The voice was that of Elijah's wife. She had been standing in the doorway for some little time, unseen by the despondent clogger.

He looked up, startled, and flushed with shame. He never talked to her as he talked to the bird; he dared not. She was a rough-gritted woman, and her faith was of the same material. Every morning for fifty years she had prayed, 'Thy will be done'; and her prayers were not repetitions, but revelations of her soul. Her love was as deep as Elijah's, only it was more submissive. To her Elijah's rebellion was as hard to bear as the affliction of her little Sam'l. Indeed, these were the two



drops of bitterness in her cup; but one was hemlock, and, as she used to say, 'A back-sliding husband wor wur (worse) than a dying child.' No wonder, then, that confusion covered Elijah when he knew his wife had overheard his complaint.

'Sam'l's nobbud restless this afternoon, 'Lijah,' she continued; 'he wants to come and sit wi' thee a bit. Aw think thaa might fotch him across. He sez it 'll be th' last chance he'll have;' and the woman turned her face away from her staring husband, and looked towards the distant moors.

'He sez what?'

But the woman did not answer.

'What is it he sez, lass?' demanded Elijah, rising from his stool and going towards his wife.

'Oh, he nobbud sez as he'd like to sit wi' thee a bit, that's all.'

'Then he shall—bless him! Aw'll fotch him.' And Elijah went for the boy.

As he stooped down over the great chair in which Samuel lay propped with pillows, he read an inscription on the little face, all drawn with

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suffering — an inscription final and unmistakable. Then he staggered, as years before he had staggered at Dene on that May Day afternoon when his sun went down in clouds.

‘Sam’l, lad, thaa mun stop where thaa art to-day ; thaa’rt too poorly to be moved.’

‘Nay, dad ! Aw’m feelin’ a deal better. Aw want to see th’ owd shop once more. Yo mun tak’ me this time. Aw’ll never ax yo’ no more.’

Elijah raised the boy in his arms and carried him over to the shop, placing him on the old settle whereon he used to spend so many of his early days. Then silence followed—a strange silence. The bird ceased to sing, Elijah lost his communicative mood, a cloud crossed the sun, and the golden bars no longer lighted the floor of the shop.

Samuel was twisting a piece of ‘tatchin’-end’ round his long, lean fingers, and looking out with dreamy eye on the distant moorland slopes that now lay dark under the sunless sky. Then, turning towards his father, he saw tears fall on the clog at which the good man was working.

‘What arto cryin’ abaat, faither?’ asked the lad.

‘Aw’m noan cryin’, Sam’l,’ said the man, stooping lower over his work. ‘Aw’m gettin’ owder, thaa sees, and mi een is noan so good as they used to be ; besides, the sun’s a bit breet-some to-day.’

‘Nay, faither, th’ sun’s given o’er shinin’—it’s covered wi’ clouds.’

‘Yi, lad, so it is—aw’d forgotten ;’ and the voice was catchy and choked with sobs.

‘But yo cannot talk, dad ; what’s up?’

Elijah was silent. Inwardly he cursed himself for letting his emotion betray itself in the presence of the lad. He had trained himself to do his weeping when alone, and learned to act the part of the joyous when with his suffering child. Indeed, he had become proficient in this hypocrisy of love, and could give with his eye and voice the lie to the feelings of his heart. On this afternoon, however, he failed in his part.

‘Nay, dad, don’t cry. Is trade bad? My mother tell’d me owd Jone o’ th’ Croft had let yo’ in for thirty paand.’

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‘ Yi ! it’s a big loss for a poor man.’

‘ But folks sez as yo’re noan poor, faither.’

‘ Thaa mornd believe all that folks sez, lad.’

‘ Happen aw’m costin’ yo’ too mich i’ doctor’s bills, faither.’

Elijah threw down the clog and rose from the stool, while strong words fought for speech on his lips. Then, with one great effort of self-repression, he said :

‘ There’s no need for thee to trouble thy yed abaat brass, mi lad. Aw’ve enough to pay for all th’ doctors i’ England, if thaa wants ’em, and then there’ll be summat to spare.’

By this time the south-westerly breeze had cleared the clouds from before the sun, and golden light once more filled the clogger’s shop, gilding the edges of the chippings and scintillating along the blades of the steel tools that lay around. As it travelled across the walls, even the sombre faces of the teetotal orators seemed to smile a welcome, while the caged bird hopped to its perch and gave back song for sunshine. Samuel’s pulse, too, beat more quickly, and, holding up his thin hand, he watched the bars blush as they shone through his wasted fingers,

and for the moment lent to them the glow of health. In vain, however, was the light sweet and pleasant to the eyes of Elijah, it only mocked him in his sadness; for him the sun was setting—setting while it was yet early day.

‘Trill-l-l-l-la trill-l-l-l-la.’

‘Faither, aw feel some sorry for that bird.’

‘Sorry, lad? whod for should ta feel sorry—it’s plenty to eat, and no lads to cob (stone) it, nor onybody to snare it and get at th’ nest—why should ta feel sorry?’

‘Aw know haa it feels i’ that cage; aw’m caged misel’, yo know.’ And the boy moved restlessly in the frame of steel that imprisoned his weakly limbs. ‘Aw think a deal abaat birds, faither.’

‘Thaa thinks a deal o’er mich, lad, abaat lots o’ things. Aw tell thee tha’s no need to bother thi yed so mich as thaa does.’

There was a great swell in the bird’s song. It was as though the little minstrel, its cage all on fire, translated the sunshine into music—a winged salamander inebriated with the flame.

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‘Aw wonder what he’s singin’ abaat naa, faither. He’s fair tipsy wi’ summat.’

‘Yi, lad, he’s tipsy wi’ th’ sun.’

‘Open th’ cage, then, an’ let him get a bit nearer to it.’

‘Nay, lad, noan so. Listen to’t! By Guy! but it’s grand!’

The bird sang on. It was as though the celestial harmonies were voicing themselves in its little throat.

‘If he’d bin loose, faither, and come daan, as other birds do, aw should a welly thought he’d bin up aboon and yerd th’ angels sing, and come to tell us what it wor like.’

‘What angels, lad?’

‘Them as mi mother reads abaat in Revelation—they as sings afoore th’ throne, yo know.’

Elijah did not care for this. To him it was a premonition of the boy’s death. It told him that Sam’l was getting near to the world of which he was so strangeiy talking, and, turning to the boy, he asked him if he were well.

‘I’m a bit tired o’ bein’ i’ th’ cage, dad, that’s all ;’ and he once more moved his twisted body wearily in his iron frame.

Wilder and more deliriously sweet waxed the bird's song.

'Aw'll tell yo' what, faither,' said Samuel, his eyes fixed on the cage: 'aw'm noan so sure but birds and angels are th' same. Ony rate, they've both getten wings, an' they both sing, durnd they?'

'Howd thi tung, and talk abaat summat else nor angels,' said Elijah.

The boy was obedient, but the bird continued, and the sun began his westering course. In a little while the boy broke forth:

'Aw say, dad, aw welly think a bird's summat like a soul.'

'Like a whod?' exclaimed Elijah with growing vexation.

'Like a soul, yo know—a bit o' one thing and a bit o' t'other.'

'There's a deal too mich talk abaat souls, lad. Folk's getten bodies as well, and they've to feed 'em, and keep 'em alive. Come along wi' me and have thi baggin' (tea).'

'Nay, aw'm noan baan while th' brid's singing i' that fashion. Yer thee! aw never yerd aught like it afoore.'

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The bird was singing with all the passion of its native realm—notes wild and glad, telling of dewy sweetnesses and skies of sunshine, of solitudes of moorland and gloom of glen, while in swift measure the caged minstrel passed from paradise to wilderness, and from wilderness to paradise of song. There were notes, too, that told of other realms—strange, mystic notes; echoes of the chorale of angels, fragments of heavenly minstrelsy; notes that rose in richer warble, and then died away into sacred silences. As Samuel listened, all the deep, unuttered thoughts, borne in upon him during long years of suffering, found translation. It was as though the air of his life, the refrain of which never left him, yet which he could never retain, was now transposed in full score by the song of the bird. The sweet, sad music of Nature, as well as that of his own heart, began now to be interpreted amid the gloom and dirt of his father's shop.

‘Well, Sam’l, if thaa willn’d let me take thee to thi baggin’, aw must be like to leave thee for a bit. Tha’ll be o’ reight, willn’d ta?’



‘ Yi—wi’ th’ brid, faither.’

It was no uncommon thing for the boy to be left alone. He liked it—liked to sit and look through the window at the great moorlands which he could never climb and roam, and at the great clouds which massed themselves like snowy ramparts beyond their purple ridges. He liked, too, to see the children play in the roadway—children active and healthy, around whose little bodies was no cage of steel; and though he sighed as he listened to their laughter, he also smiled as he looked out and watched their pranks.

The sun was now weaving his farewell tints along the tops of the moorlands, and fragments of cloud—lone wanderers of the sky—were slowly sailing towards the western fires. Around the central flame unseen hands were massing cloud portals draped in gold and purple, through which paved paths of sapphire stretched in dreamy distances, and whereon the shadows fell as haunting presences from other worlds. It was a sunset prophetic of a vast beyond, and, as Samuel gazed at it with wondering and longing eyes, he thought of words his mother

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sometimes read to him—‘ the tabernacle of God that was set in the sun.’

As the boy looked out at these sunset glories a strange fancy possessed his childish mind—he would free the bird, and let it soar away along the distant vistas where it might hear the angels, and return, perhaps, to sing over again to him their songs. But, alas! he could not touch the cage. Cripple as he was, movement and reach were beyond his powers.

Tapping at the window, he drew the notice of the boys who played in the square of land before him, and, beckoning them to the door of the shop, bade them remove the cage from the hook in the wall and place it on his knee.

The bird showed no terror. There was no wild fluttering, no frantic beating against the bars, as Samuel drew aside the wire grating. The little songster nestled towards the lean white hand which he reached out towards it, and let him draw it forth to his own lap.

‘Aw’m baan to set thee loose, little un,’ said the boy. ‘It’s hard work bein’ caged, isn’t it? But thaa’s a mate i’ me—aw’m caged an’ o’.’ And again the boy moved in his torturing

frame. 'But aw'm baan to let thee go. Happen God 'ill let me go an' o'. It would be grand if aw could go wi' thee! But if He doesn'd, little bird, thaa mun come back to me, an' tell me what thaa yers when thaa'rt up aboon. Naa then, off wi' thee!' And so saying he kissed the bird and launched it through the open door of the shop into the deepening blue beyond.

The boy watched the bird until it became a speck in the distance ; then, dreamily closing his eyes, he slept. And as he slept, God's kindly hand unfastened the hasps of the cage in which he had been imprisoned for so many years. At last he was free.

In a few minutes Elijah returned from his tea, and, looking round, saw the cage on the shop counter without the bird, and Sam'l, as he thought, asleep.

Then, as by instinct, the truth dawned on him. The bird had winged its way into the ether, and little Samuel's soul was beyond the sunset—for kindly hands had set both free.

## IV.

### THE VIGIL OF DESPAIR.

THAT night, as little Samuel lay sheeted in the hush of the spare chamber, and his mother, weary with sorrow, slept on the settle below, Elijah stole across to the shop that he might keep the vigil of his despair alone. Entering, he lighted a candle, and so held it as to scan the dark recesses from which the soul of the child had so lately passed. There was the rude shakedown whereon he had lain, and the book the pages of which he last turned over, while the iron frame, wherein his limbs were so long tortured, and which Elijah so hastily removed in his vain attempts to revive the boy, lay on the floor side by side with the vacant cage of the bird. Grief is the great quickener of memory—at least, so Elijah found it—for as he

stood with uplifted light, and looked around with eyes of sorrow, there came an awakening in the graveyard of his past. Stones were rolled away from tombs over which flowers had grown, and tones of voice and turns of expression, with many a forgotten trifle, cast off their cerements and came forth. Laughter, lisp, and song—he heard them in the silence; looks, gladsome and sorrowful—he saw them in the gloom; reminders of the dead child were everywhere.

As he wandered, candle in hand, round the shadowed shop, he began to yield to the weakness of despair. He saw the mockery of life, then felt its cruelty; the hollow laughter of one, and the envenomed fang of the other, plaguing him in his sore distress. He put the candle on the bench, and sat down on his stool, the litter of his toil a fit emblem of his dishevelled mind. At his feet lay the frame of irons he had that afternoon taken from the dead body of his boy—the cage in which for so many years the child had been imprisoned—and there, at its side, was the wire prison-house of the now freed bird. Where were their once captives? The bird, perchance, nestling in the

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foliage of a neighbouring clough. But the boy—where? And yet Elijah had heard the preachers at the chapel on the hill ask times often: ‘Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father’s notice. Fear not, therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.’ Fool ever to have listened to such words. The bird was free—free in the greenery of the woods; the boy dead—dead after years of living death.

Thus reasoning, his eye again fell on the dead boy’s torture-frame, and seizing it, together with the cage of the bird, he trampled both beneath his feet. Nor was he satisfied with this; for taking up a hammer, he beat them into a shapeless mass, continuing long after their destruction to deliver his blows.

Though the hour was late, there were neighbours who heard the strokes of Elijah’s demolition, and these, alert with the curiosity of rural life, came to their doors, to see in the mellow light of the June midnight the flicker of the candle in the window of the clogger’s shop.

‘He’s noan makin’ th’ lad’s coffin, is he?’ asked one.

‘Nod he; he’s makin’ a bit o’ o’ertime, more like,’ said another.

‘Nay; aw think thaa’t mistaan. Thaa’ll see he’ll noan do mich wark afore th’ lad’s berried.’

‘But whad’s he agate wi’ a leet at this time o’ neet?’

‘Let’s go and see. Hooisht! tread softly.’

And they went—curious neighbours all—went with silent tread and bated breath, some of them in their ignorance thinking of the wraith of the dead boy, for superstition is slow to die in rural haunts. But they found, as ever, the unexpected—no coffin in course of preparation, nor clog in the making, nor did the ghost of the departed child meet their eyes. To their dismay, they saw the bereaved father, maddened with grief, standing, hammer in hand, over a wreck of iron and wire, his tearless eyes burning with a fierce fire, while from his lips fell mutterings which they failed to overhear.

As the frightened faces of the watchers pressed towards the window, the swealing candle lit up the shop with a corpse-like pallor. Feeble and

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fitful the flicker fell on the ashen face of Elijah, throwing it into a different cast with each leap and fall. Long shadows stole hither and thither, lurking for a moment in the distant corners, and then, like the cloaked dead, crossing the littered floor. Now they would smite the time-stained walls, pausing and then passing with swift movement, as though to escape the shadows that pursued. Then they would throw their gloom over the grief-smitten man, veiling him and bowing before him, as if to do him homage in his despair. This was what the prying neighbours saw, and this stirred to speech their rude and excitable imaginations.

‘He’ll loise his wits,’ whispered one.

‘He’s lost ’em a’ready, lad, or he’d never smash th’ furniture.’

‘He’s noan smashin’ th’ furniture. He’s nobbud puncin’ (kicking) th’ clog-irons.’

‘What mun he punce clog-irons for if he wor reight?’ asked the first speaker.

‘It’s a thaasand pities,’ said a woman. ‘He wor a daycent chap, wor ’Lijah—as quiet as a kittlin’ an’ o’.’

‘Them’s ’em ’at’s awlus worst when they go



wrang,' interjected an old crone. 'They bide a deal o' mindin', aw can tell yo'.'

'Yi, they do. Aar John's wife wor as gentle a lass as broke brade; but when hoo went wrang wi' her first child, hoo wor plaguy rough, aw con tell yo'.'

'Let's see : hoo deed, didn't hoo?'

'Hoo did, poor lass! an' th' best as could happen to her an' o'.'

'Aw feel ill off for 'Lijah, poor lad! It's a terrible thing to loise a child; an' little Sammy wor a'most awlus wi' him. But he's better off naa.'

'But it's only them as looks on as thinks so. 'Lijah noan thinks so, aw back.'

'Nowe; he doesn'd that.'

'Little Sam'l wor noan one o' th' sort 'at lives, thaa knows,' said the old crone. 'They tak' th' good uns up aboon to keep 'em fro' spoilin'.'

'Yi! Sam'l were pious like—a bit o'er-mich so for this world.'

'Thine ud do wi' a bit more, lass; he's awlus i' lumber (mischief). But it tak's all soarts to mak' a world.'

‘Th’ lad had a deal o’ larnin’,’ continued the old crone. ‘He’d a yed like a almalac (almanac). There wor naught he didn’t know; an’ ’Lijah wor savin’ brass for his eddication.’

‘’Lijah’s never like looked up sin’ that May Da’ show at Dene,’ said the first speaker.

‘Nowe. Thaa sees he set his mind on th’ lad bein’ a parson; an’ when he geet his back hurt, an’ wor crippled, poor lad! it were all no use. They noan mak’ parsons o’ sich like, thaa sees.’

‘Nowe,’ interjected the old crone; ‘they mak’ angels on ’em. But as yo’ say, ’Lijah’s never bin reight sin’ th’ lad were lamed.’

‘He’s noan goan to chapel mich sin’. They say as he’s a infidel naa.’

‘Not he!’ cried the old woman in tones of low indignation. ‘He’s nobbud i’ th’ valley. He’ll get into th’ sunleet i’ a bit. Aw’ve bin where he is misel’, but aw get aat agen.’

‘Aw’ll tell yo’ whod—aw’m some ill off for him, sithee haa bad he’s takin’ it.’ And the neighbours who thus talked in whispers once more peeped through the window of the shop at the distracted father.

There he sat, his face buried in his hands,

oblivious in the blankness of a great sorrow. His bent form was thrown into relief by the flicker of the now wasted candle, whose tongues of flame became less rhythmic, springing for a moment into pyramids of pale fire, then sinking into the socket, where they spat and hissed as if in protest of their dying light.

The weird spectacle played on the rude imagination of the watchers. To them, Elijah sat in some world, all his own, where light and darkness fought around him, and where darkness was conquering with each lingering, yet fainter, leap of flame. There he sat, careless as to the conflict, until at last a long, thin shaft shot up from the candle and lit the shop with its momentary ray, to die into a glowing thread, and then consume in smoke, leaving all to the darkness of the night. Then the watching neighbours stole off one by one, and Elijah was left to his vigil of despair.

And now haunting thoughts followed haunting shadows, grim questioners that revelled in the desolations of his mind, voices from out the darkness that mocked as they whispered their problems in his ear. In troops they came;

nor could he silence them ; nor did he care to. They told him God had turned His face away from His gift, that He had despoiled it—flung it back at him marred and broken. They asked him where Heaven's gratitude was, and where its pity, and where the heart of a God who had taken his little one and dashed it against the stones! They sneered at his once simple trust, and turned the texts which he had been taught to trust into a tissue of lies. And then they left him, and there followed in their wake a great wind of blasphemy, which, sweeping through him, left him desolate.

After this he heard another voice, calm, penetrating, as of good utterance—a voice he never afterwards forgot, and which to his dying hour he believed to be a voice :

*'It pleased the Lord to bruise him.'*

Startled, he looked round. Nothing but the darkness, and the shadows returning to mock and ask, Where but in darkness could such a God dwell—a God who found pleasure in bruising an innocent child?

And other questioners vexed him. 'Were not a father's sins a child's heritage of suffer-

ing? Yea, even to the third and fourth generation.' And Elijah placed himself in the confessional of memory and of conscience that he might recall his life. But no sin of his own could he discover to merit such misfortune! He had honoured the commandments and kept the faith. He recalled bad fathers whose children were living and healthy, and bad lads who throve and led charmed lives amid the dangers of the factory and exposures of the field. Yet here he was, a good man, whose child was better than himself, and—for what? And once more round the ruined temple of his soul the sounds of laughter rang, and he groped in the darkness to find that God was gone.

At last weariness came as an opiate ; nor was his brain haunted with the figments of the night, for sleep was kindly, and he dreamed not. His head pillowed on a roll of leather, his body stretched on the cold flag floor, he passed into that undisturbed darkness which is Nature's kindest compensation after hours of heaviest strain.

The glimmer of dawn as it fell through the window of the clogger's shop discovered a scene

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of confusion, strange to an orderly life like that of Elijah. The stool on which he worked was overturned, and surrounded with a litter of tools—hammers, awls, knives, ends of iron, scraps of leather, and rivets of steel and wood. As the gloom on the walls gave way before the growing light, the teetotal orators, fastened in irregular rows, looked out from their soiled and tattered prints with unresponsive eyes, while the upturned face of the sleeping man showed wrinkled lines, moist with the sweat of sorrow. As the morning advanced, golden lights transformed both shop and sleeper, filling the one with radiance, and weaving round the head of the other a halo of gold, while a little bird lighted on the sill and trilled its early song. Sun and music roused Elijah from his slumber, and, stretching himself, he slowly brought to mind his surroundings. Then all the keener, because of the suddenness of its return, came his sorrow, and he saw, as never on the previous day, the blank of his life.

Rising, he opened the door, and stepped out into the village street. The moors lay dimly in the distance, their slopes yet shadowy, their

summits luminous with flushy bars of palpitating light. Beneath a coverlet of mist, white as a cloud, slept the village, and from the tall chimney of the factory thin smoke curled and lost itself in the paling blue. The foliage was motionless, and from the gardens floated the subtle scent of flowers, their chalices moist with dew-tears of the night, soon to be caressed into brightness and gladness by the light of day. In a neighbouring nursery of trees birds were piping occasional notes—heralds of a coming chorus to scatter the silences and announce the morn. Yet the light was not pleasant to the eyes of Elijah, nor did the summer-tide lift and bear away the burden of his heart.

Crossing the road that divided the shop from his house, he entered, to find his wife quietly following the duties of the morning hour. She was without Elijah's strong sentiment, but her practical mind and strong self-control were never at fault, and where he stumbled she walked steadily, and with a sure foot. She had loved the child no less than he; indeed, the sorrow which she hid was keener than the sorrow which he flung in part from him in his

manifested despair. Nature had reversed the qualities : the husband was heart, and the wife was brain. Thus, while Samuel had looked on his mother with an eye of pride, he had nestled towards his father with what is mostly the woman's share in the division of prizes of the household. She thought more of a clean face for her child than a warm kiss from his lips—with the consequence that the kisses had been saved for Elijah. And yet her heart held hidden fires, and she had many a record in her memory, and many a reminiscence, which she was then recalling through the tears of the eyes of her soul. As he entered, they looked each other in the face, and read there the unspoken thought of each other's sorrow.

For a little while both were silent. Asenath knew Elijah better than he was known to himself, and waited for the confessions of the night which she felt sure would soon fall unasked for from his lips. Nor did she wait long ; his full heart soon opened its treasure of sorrow at her feet. Slowly, and broken by sobs, he told her how he had destroyed in his despair the iron cage in which the body of little Sam'l was so long



imprisoned and punished, and with it the cage of the flown bird. Then he spoke of the hard and bitter thoughts which had shadowed his mind—of his unbelief in what ‘them Methodies’ called Providence; and, last of all, in the simplicity of his sorrow, of the voice out of the darkness which said, ‘*It pleased the Lord to bruise him,*’ and how he had given the voice the lie.

‘Nay, lad, thaa never did—surely!’

‘Yi, aw did, an’ aw’ll do it agen.’

‘But whod if it wor little Sam’l’s voice, ’Lijah?’

‘Little Sam’l’s voice—what doesto mean? He’s dead, isn’t he? He’ll talk no more.’

‘Ey, ’Lijah, aw awlus thought thaa’d more faith nor me. Thaa’s done a deal more prayin’ an’ singin’ i’ thi time, lad, nor ever aw did, and yet thaa tak’s on i’ this feshion. Doesn’d ta see thaa’s getten thi wish naa—th’ lad’s a preycher, nobbud he’s preychin’ fro’ aboon, and whod thaa yerd wor his first sarmon.’

Then it dawned on the man that what he heard in the dark hour of sorrow, as he sat disconsolate in the lonesome shop, was the voice of

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the boy, who from the bosom of the great Father told the secret of that Father's love to the sad-hearted father who was yet to live his 'little while.'

'Let's go up to th' chamber and look at him, lass.'

There lay the boy, sheeted and silent, the twisted form of his frame lifting the covering into irregular and uneven folds, but from his face the look of care was gone, and round his brow was the crown of peace. And then a sun-beam stole in between the blind and the jamb of the window which it veiled—a soft, pure beam from the gates of the morning, from the gates that told of entrance to eternal day—and it lay on the face of the child and so transformed it that it shone as the face of an angel.

And Elijah drew down the face-cloth as if to hide the glory that excelleth, and went below to begin another day's labour with a better mind and brighter hope.

V.

LITTLE SAMUEL'S SUBSTITUTE.

'WHOSE is that little lad lookin' into th' garden, 'Lijah?'

'Th' new vicar's son ;' said Elijah, continuing to eat his noonday meal.

'Aw'll tell thi whod : he favors (resembles) aar Sam'l ; he does, forshure.'

'Aw've thought as mich misel', lass,' said the man.

'Then, thaa's seen him afoore, hasto?'

'Yi ; he come i' th' shop t'other day for some tatchin-end for his whip.'

'Thaa never said naught, 'Lijah?'

'Nowe, lass, aw never said naught.'

The truth was, since the death of their son they had seldom spoken to one another of children, for mention of them brought tears to

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the eyes of Elijah and heaviness into the heart of Asenath. Each knew the other's sorrow, and was slow to disturb it, yet each longed to talk with the other of that which they dared not broach. This was the cause of Elijah's silence concerning the visit of the vicar's son, and now the boy himself had come to break the spell.

Only a few days before he stood, with curious eyes, outside the clogger's shop, watching Elijah draw his tatchin-end with slow and vigorous sweep, lost in wonder at what to him was a novel craft. Taken with the kindly look that lit the workman's face, the boy next moved towards the open door, and, gaining heart, asked what it was at which he laboured.

'It's a clog, little un; onyroad, it will be when it's fashioned. But thaa'rt no wiser, aw see,' said Elijah, as he watched the look of ignorance on the boy's face. 'A clog, thaa knows, is to keep folk feet warm. We all wear 'em i' these parts, little uns like thee an' o'. But who might ta be?'

The boy blushed, and, though not able to follow the vernacular of the clogger, he

read with a child's instinct its meaning, and said :

‘My father's the new vicar, you know.’

‘Nay, lad, that's just what aw didn't know till thaa tell'd me. And where might yore faither come fro', if it's a fair question?’

‘From Norfolk,’ said the boy. ‘That's ever so far away. There was the sea and boats where we lived, and I used to play with the fishermen. I had a boat—Jack Kemp made it for me. But there's no sea to sail it on here, so I take it to the water by the mill.’

‘Bless thi little heart! Come here an' sit agen me. Aw once had a lad like thee. Thaa favors him and o'. Sit thi daan, aw tell thi, an' make thisel' at whom.’

‘And where is your little boy?’ asked the child with growing confidence.

‘He's up aboon,’ replied Elijah.

‘Is it a long way off?’—for the boy understood not Elijah's tongue.

‘Nay, lad, aw durnd know. Sometimes it seems as if it were, and sometimes it doesn'd. But thaa mun ax thi faither ; he should know better nor me.’

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'Does my father know where *upaboon* is?' asked the boy with some uncertainty.

'Well, lad, he ought to. Up aboon is' nobbud another name for heaven.'

A ray of consciousness lit up the boy's face, and, coming to the clogger's side, he said :

'Then, your little boy is dead?'

'Thaa has it naa,' was Elijah's sad reply.

'I have a brother in heaven, but I never saw him ; he died before I was born, but they call me after him.'

'And what's that, little un?'

'Percy. What did they call your little boy?'

'Sam'l.'

'Was he ever naughty?'

'Never, lad.'

'What a funny boy ! Father says I'm often naughty.'

'Happen yo're better for 't. Onyroad, yo'll live longer. There's naught like a bit o' devilment at after o' ; it like shows as chilter are gradely weel.'

'I can't tell what you say.'

'Better as yo' shouldn't, lad. Aw'm nobbud talking.'

‘May I come again, please?’

‘Yi, as oft as yo’ like. But yo’ mun ax yore faither first. Aw’m noan o’ yore lot, yo’ know.’

The boy looked perplexed.

‘Aw mean aw’m noan o’ yore sect, yo’ know. Aw noan belong to th’ Church. Aw’m a Methody, yo’ know. Happen yore faither willn’d let yo’ come and see me when he knows. But yo’ mun ax him.’

‘My father will let me come and see you if you are a good man,’ was the boy’s frank reply.

Such was Elijah’s introduction to the vicar’s son. Of this, however, his wife knew nothing, for he dared not speak of it, lest he frayed the old wound so long in healing. And now the boy was standing at the garden gate, under the keen eye of Asenath, who already traced in his face a likeness to their dead child.

‘Lijah,’ said the woman, ‘aw think aw’ll go an’ speak to th’ lad. He looks fair longin’ at th’ flairs. Happen he wants one,’

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And Asenath went down the garden-path to where the child was standing.

‘Doesto want a flaar?’ said she.

‘Oh, please may I have one?’ cried the boy. ‘We had lots in Norfolk, but there are none at the vicarage here. I do so want to go back to where the flowers are.’

‘Come inside, mi lad, an’ aw’ll find thi some flaars, such as they are, tha knows, for it’s too wet and coud to grow mony here.’ And, opening the gate, she led him along the path, on each side of which blushed those stars of earth on which he longed to look.

This garden was the child of a former generation, and as fragrant with memories as it was with scent of flowers and simples. Many a plant and bush had been set by hands now lying under the mould, their perennial life reversing the sentiment of Hebrew poesy, and telling of man that fadeth, and of a herb and flower that endured through all generations. Elijah used to say that ‘th’ moniments (tombstones) o’ their family were noan i’ th’ chapel yard, but amang th’ trees and flaars o’ their own gardin.’ And in quiet hours he would wander amid its



little zone of vegetation and think of his dead who had their resurrection with each springtide, and their life of companionship with each recurrent summer. To him this was more vivid and sacred than graven escutcheon or mural tablet. The story of Elijah's ancestry lay in his garden, and jealously he preserved it.

Taking his hand, the woman led the timid boy along the path towards the cottage door. On the way, however, they came to a plot of ground glowing with geraniums, and in the midst of which a sweetbrier grew, mingling its intoxicating scents with the sea of passionate colour that waved around.

'I used to have a little garden like that in Norfolk,' said the boy.

'Bless thee!' was Asenath's reply. For that little patch of garden had been her boy's—nay, it was his still, called by his name, and always spoken of as 'little Sam'l's bed.' Before he was crippled he used to tend it with his toy spade, and afterwards, during the long summer days and evenings, he would sit near it, scenting the sweetbrier and delighting his eye on the colours of the scattered flowers. And now the

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boy at her side had, in part, claimed it. What was this but a link to bind her by one living to him that was dead?

As they stood and watched the swaying brier, and the undulating sea of colour that surrounded it, Percy felt the woman's hand tighten in its grip of his own. Looking up into her face, he saw the shadow there, and he wondered how it was in an hour so bright and in a place so beautiful Asenath should look so sad. Little did he think that for the moment he had robbed the brier of its fragrance and the geraniums of their scarlet bloom. Yet it was even so, for the woman recalled the last child-hand she clasped, and the last child-voice she heard, beside the very flowers before which they were now standing.

Coming to herself, she said :

‘Come into th’ haase an’ see ‘Lijah. Thaa knows him, durnd yo ; it’s him as thaa wor talkin’ to i’ th’ shop. He gave thi some tatchin-end for thi whip, thaa knows. Come along, he’ll be fain to see thi. Don’t be feard.’ And the boy walked along with the woman towards the house.

'Here's thi little friend, 'Lijah,' said Asenath. Then, turning to the child, she whispered, 'Go to him, that's a good lad.'

Percy walked up to where Elijah sat and put out his hand; then he looked up into the seamed and sorrowful face to be kissed. But the strong man turned away his head, and the boy was afraid.

'He'll kiss thee in a bit,' said Asenath. 'He's noan so weel just naa; but he's taken to thee, for o' that. Hasn't ta, 'Lijah?' And the man motioned assent.

The boy's eyes now began to wander round the spacious kitchen in which he found himself. He looked long and intently at the flaring Christmas almanacs issued by rival tradesmen, and which as yet had not been removed from the walls. He viewed the heavy, highly-polished furniture, the great chair and settle, and eight-day clock that stood sentinel-like in the distant corner of the room. His curious gaze played around the pot figures and brass ornaments ranged along the chimney-shelf. He saw, too, the black cross-beams that carried the chamber floor, and from which were strung

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the hams and fitches which Elijah called 'th' bonniest picters ov all.' At last he caught sight of a toy gun hanging from a nail behind the door. In a moment his reserve was gone, he was himself, and, clapping his hands, he cried :

'Oh, a little gun! Whose is it?'

Poor boy! he knew not the painful wound those words made in the heart of the man and woman whom he so innocently questioned. Asenath looked at Elijah, who was looking vacantly on the floor. Both were silent, and the boy, whose quick instinct told him something was wrong, began to cry.

'Tell him, lass, tell him!' said Elijah. 'He'll hav to know some time, an' he mut as weel know naa.'

Then Asenath drew Percy to her side and told him the sad story of little Samuel's life—told it all, and only as a mother could tell it; and when she finished he put his arms round her and kissed her, and the woman wept, and the frozen tears were thawed by a child's embrace, for one had come near to her who, while not her own, had brought her own the nearer.

'Naa, lass, we con talk abaat aar own,' said Elijah. And ever afterwards their tongues were loosed to one another on the memory of the boy Samuel.

'Would ta like to look at his potograf?' asked Asenath. And, the boy assenting, she took down an album from a chest of drawers.

Opening it on the table before him, she turned over the pages until she came to one well thumbed and tear-stained, on which were three crude samples of the photographer's art.

'That's him when he wor a babby,' said she. 'He wor taken on mi knee, an' 'Lijah stannin' at th' back on us. Thaa wor some praad that day, 'Lijah. Doesto remember? It wor Dene Fair. An' that,' said the woman, pointing to another, 'wor taken when he wor five year owd. He wor as bonny a lad then as thaa art, Percy, an' as straight an' strappin' an o'.'

Then, after a pause, she continued :

'An' this wor th' last he ever had ta'n. He wor a cripple then. Sithee, haa his yed's daan o' his little shoulders. But he's o' reight naa, bless him!'

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‘Yi, he’s o’ reight, lass. But aw’d fain ha’ kept him.’

The little fellow took in the story with wondering ears. It was his initiation into the temple of domestic sorrow, and he never afterwards forgot it. Henceforth to him there was a halo of sacredness around the lives of Elijah and Asenath.

‘Come along o’er to th’ shop wi’ me, Percy, an’ we’ll see what we con find for yo’,’ said Elijah.

‘Yi ; an’ durnd forget to come back an’ see me, and come to-morn—it’s bakin’ day, an’ aw’ll make thee a butter-cake.’

So Elijah and Percy left Asenath to her household work, and all through the hours of that afternoon the old man and the boy talked, the one hammering away at his clogs, interrupted now and again by chance callers, the other ‘rootin’,’ as Elijah called it, among scraps of leather and iron, and ‘messin’’ his hands with wax and blacking. It was new life to the boy, and he revelled in it ; and to Elijah it was a reawakening.

That evening, in the large room at the

vicarage, Mr. Denby and his wife listened to the story of little Samuel told with all the vividness and truthfulness of a child ; and when Percy finished, his father drew his hand across his eyes, and said, ' My dear, that is what I call a story of the heart,' while she to whom he spake drew her boy closer to her side as the evening shadows fell. And as those shadows fell in the homely kitchen of the clogger, Elijah and his wife talked of the little fellow whom God had sent as the substitute of the lost one.

' An' thaa'll bake him his cake to-morn, Asenath?' said Elijah.

' Aw will, lad, aw con tell thee, if aw live.'

' An' thaa'll bake it same road as thaa baked little Sam'l's?'

' Same road, lad, an' th' same soart.'

' Yi, aw would like it to be as like as thaa con mak' it. Somehaa Sam'l doesn'd seem to be so far off when yon lad's near. Th' owd shop's leeted up wi' sunshine sin' he begun o' comin' into 't, an' his ways, thaa knows, are so like Sam'l's.'

' They are, forshure.'

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‘Happen his mother wirnd let him eyt thi butter-cakes.’

‘Hoo will if hoo’s a mother—an’ aw welly think hoo is, for th’ lad has th’ ways ov a lad ’at’s weel mothered; yo’ can soon tell, yo’ know.’

‘Thaa’rt a quick-witted un, lass, an’ no mistak’! Come on, let’s sleep on’t.’ And with a lighter heart they climbed the stairway to the chamber above.

There were two famous days in the monotony of the Heatherlow week—Monday and Thursday. On the former every doorway seethed with steam and smelt of suds, emitting sounds of mangles and wringers, as though in protest of the strain to which they were put by strong-armed housewives. Women with bare and shiny arms would stand, their tucked-up skirts exposing their stockinged ankles and clogged feet, emptying their ‘dolly-tubs’ into the channels, with scarce time for joke or passing news, while on every spare piece of land the crossed lines of rope would sag with the drying folds of linen, grotesque articles of under-



clothing unblushingly flaunting in the drying wind. Throughout these days 'th' childer were awlus i' th' gate,' and at evening the men thronged the public-house, for, however fine and warm the weather, the house was clammy, the floor sloppy, and the good-wife in an ill frame of mind.

But on Thursdays it was otherwise. Then the fire burned brightly, and the heated oven warmed the spacious kitchens in which the people lived. Towards evening appetising odours stole forth, and whetted many a wanderer's palate as he passed the open door. Children hurried home from school eager for their 'baggin',' not forgetful that it was the feast of the week. All along the stone floor the cooling loaves and cakes would stand in regimental order, while many a little finger was thrust in to filch a currant when the mother's back was turned. Then the hot 'mouffins' (cakes) were drawn from heated oven-plates, and split and buttered, to be washed down hungry throats with sweetened cups of tea. Thursday evening found Heatherlow in a happy mood — even grumblers held their peace as

they drew their chairs towards the groaning boards.

Asenath had been busy all the day. She prided herself on her baking. With her, mixing and kneading were solemn duties. She knew how to temper her oven to a degree, and her flour and yeast were proportioned with mathematical precision, and the bread she made always waited on appetite, and on digestion, too. To and fro she moved with nimble steps that kept time to the clatter of tins and click of opening and closing oven-door, her face and arms flushed with the heat from the fire, and big drops of perspiration moistening her brow, while over the great kitchen floated the incense of newly-baked bread. Just as she was turning a tin of cakes, the doorway darkened, and, looking up, she saw the vicar's little son watching her every act with expectant gaze.

'Bless thee!—is it thee, Percy? Come in. Thaa'rt as welcome as th' flaa's i' May. Sit thee daan ; thi cake 'll be ready soon. There's one for thi to eyt wi' me and 'Lijah, and one for thi to tak' whom. We know haa to bake

bread i' Heatherlow, whatever else. Yi, fit for th' Queen, if hoo eyts aught as plain.'

The boy came into the room, and sat down by the window, where the sun was playing fantastic tricks among the rich clusters of flowering plants that filled the sill. The little chair on which he sat was framed on rockers, and to and fro he swung himself in rhythmic oscillation, talking the while, and following the movements of Asenath.

'Did Samuel like cakes, Mrs. Holt?' asked he at last, as he took his eye from the little gun that hung behind the door.

'He did afoore he were lamed, Percy, but at after he never took to his meat. Like as he wor awlus ailin', poor lad! 'Lijah and me had to get him relishes (appetising morsels or dainties), and then, as often as not, he never bote his baggin' (never touched his food).'

'And did you have a doctor to him, Mrs. Holt?'

'Doctor, didto say? Yi, half a dozen; an' they fair punished him an' o'. But it wor all no use: he geet wur' i'stead o' better. But say no more abaat him naa, Percy; here's 'Lijah

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comin', an' it 'll nobbud upset him if we talk abaat th' lad afoore him.'

'So thaa's come to thi tay, hasto, Percy?' asked Elijah, as he came into the kitchen and saw the boy seated by the flower-filled windows. 'Aw thought happen thi faither wouldn'd let thi come to poor folk like us.'

'Father says they say you have plenty of money, Mr. Holt.'

'Well, tell thi faither it's all bin worked for. It's noan come, as some folk does, wi' doin' naught.'

'Howd thi din, 'Lijah, an' let th' lad alone. He's nobbud tellin' thee what he's yerd. Come on, Percy; draw up thi cheer and hav' some tay.'

The boy sat down before the table, while Asenath filled his mug with tea. It was a china mug, and of rare device, a white shield on a crimson ground, bearing an inscription in letters of gold. For months it had been hidden away with other treasures too sacred for the common use, but in honour of Percy it once more saw the light. His eye was at once caught with the pattern and name, and, in

raising it to his lips, he read out, half aloud and half to himself,

*'Samuel Holt.'*

Elijah and Asenath were silent ; the man looking out into the garden, where the wind was scattering the petals of the flowers, while the woman turned towards the firelight, where she saw a long-missed face.



ELIJAH INTRODUCES THE VICAR  
TO HIS PARISHIONERS.





## ELIJAH INTRODUCES THE VICAR TO HIS PARISHIONERS.

MR. DENBY, the new vicar, whose little son had made such friends of Elijah and Asenath, called in one morning to interview the clogger, determined to satisfy himself as to the company the young hopeful was keeping in his spare moments in this his new home.

‘Good - morning,’ said he, entering, and addressing the man who was bending low over his work. ‘Are you Mr. Holt?’

‘Well, aw durnd know for th’ “Mister.” We durnd use handles to aar names i’ these parts.’

‘Then your name is Holt, I suppose?’

‘Yi, it used to be, but they nobbud co’ me ‘Lijah naa.’

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‘Elijah—yes. Well, it’s a good name. Do you know what it signifies?’

‘Hard wark, an’ plenty on’t—leastways, that’s what it signifies to me;’ and, without looking up at the vicar, Elijah continued at his task.

‘But it has another signification: it stands for “the strong Lord.”’

‘Aw didn’t know. But then, yo’ see, aw’m noan paid to be larned in scripiter, as yo’ are.’

‘Just so. But do you ever go to hear those who are?’

‘Aw’ve bin a bit i’ mi time. But yo’ mut as weel know aw’m noan o’ yore lot. Aw go to th’ chapel on th’ hill yonder—aw’m a Methody.’ And Elijah looked up in the vicar’s face with all the defiance and independence of the valley of which he was a native.

‘A Methodist, are you? Then we’ll shake hands; my father was a Methodist, and I always love them for his sake.’

‘Then haa is it yo’re not a Methody and o’, if yore faither wor?’ asked Elijah in surprise.

‘Was your father a Methodist?’ queried the vicar.

‘Nowe,’ was the short and sullen answer.

‘Then why are you one?’

‘Because aw thought aw’d mend a bit on th’ owd chap’s ways.’

‘Just so ; and don’t you think I could mend on my father’s ways?’ laughingly asked the vicar.

‘There’s no mendin’ on Methodies,’ was Elijah’s summary rejoinder ; ‘they’re at th’ top, aw con tell yo’, an’ they’ll tak some beatin’.’

The vicar broke into a hearty laugh. He had only been six weeks in the parish, and at first the rude independence of the folks greatly irritated him, coming, as he did, from the eastern counties. But he was learning to take a keen interest in this strangely original type of character, and entering with zest into its blunt straightforwardness and ready wit. Elijah’s answer was to his manly mind.

‘Then your father was a Churchman, I suppose?’

‘Nowe, he worn’d a Churchman.’

‘A Baptist?’

‘What! a dipper, do yo’ mean? Nowe ; yo’re wrang agen.’

‘Well, what was he, then?’

‘He wor naught.’

‘I never heard of that sect before,’ said the vicar.

‘Yo’ soon will. There’s mony o’ them sort i’ these parts, aw con tell yo’.’

‘What is their creed?’

‘They haven’t gotten’ noan.’

‘Then where do they worship?’

‘Oh, at th’ public-haase—at th’ Sheaf and Sickle up the street yon.’

‘Ah, I begin to see what you mean. Yes, I am afraid there are a good many of that sort, as you call them, in this parish.’

Now came a pause—an awkward pause. Who was to speak next? Elijah was too proud, and the vicar knew not what to say. At last he turned to Elijah, and said :

‘I called to thank you for your kindness to my little boy. He often talks about you and your wife. You have no little ones, I think. They will be grown up now, I suppose?’

A film came over Elijah’s eyes, and his throat filled so that he could not answer the kindly-voiced question of the vicar.

Mr. Denby, with his quick, gentlemanly instinct, saw his mistake, and, looking round the shop, fixed his eye on the engravings of the old teetotal orators pasted on the wall.

‘You have Gough here, I see, and Lees, and Livesey, too. These will be your heroes, Mr. Holt?’

‘Yi ; aw’ve yerd some on ’em, an’ aw believe i’ all on ’em, dead an’ alive. Aw wor so ooined (punished) wi’ a drunken faither misel’ that aw made up mi mind aw’d never touch a drop o’ drink as long as aw’d breath i’ mi body, an’ aw never have ; an’ there’s a mony wet uns i’ aar trade, aw con tell yo’.’

‘Many what?’

‘Wet uns—felleys that’s fond o’ their ale.’

‘They call you a clogger, I think. I never saw a shoe of the kind you make before I came to this parish. Are they warmer than leather soles?’ And so saying, the vicar took one up in his hands and carefully looked at it. ‘Wooden bottoms, I see, edged with iron. Heavy to wear, I should think. Are they not?’

‘Not to them as has never worn naught else,’ was the simple reply.

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‘You have a great many in for repairs, have you not?’ said the vicar, looking round.

‘Yi; it’s a throng time just naa.’ Then, after another pause: ‘There’s a deal o’ character in a clog, Mr. Denby. Folk soon wear ’em into th’ shap’ o’ thirsels.’

The vicar confessed ignorance as to Elijah’s meaning.

‘Why, it’s i’ this road. When aw see haa a clog’s worn aw con tell th’ character o’ th’ chap as wears it. Do yo’ see? Naa, there’s a pair yonder,’ and Elijah pointed with his hammer to two clogs on the counter. ‘Them belongs to a tramp weaver. He’s a stranger i’ these parts. Aw never seed him afoore last neet, and aw know naught on him; but aw con tell yo’ what kind of a felley he is. Look here,’ and Elijah slipped the clog over his hand, and held it up for the vicar’s inspection. ‘Them heels is daan on th’ inside; that shows as he’s knock-kneed. Them toes is ill worn, so yo’ may tak’ it he’s noan a chap as looks mich at th’ stars. That sole’s split, an’ it hasn’t bin split latly, so yo’ may mak’ up yore mind he hasn’t got mich brass; for noan on ’em like a split

clog ; as they say abaat here, "it sucks watter an' chews pavin' stones." An' then yon nobbud to luk at it, and yo'll see it favors a tramp. Sithee! what a shaffling look it has!' And finishing his discourse, Elijah threw down the clog in disgust.

'Then your clogs are books, in which you read strange matters, Mr. Holt?'

'Summat o' that sort,' replied Elijah. 'There's a deal o' wisdom in 'em. Naa, there's a pair there agen yore feet ; they've tan him as owns 'em a deal oftener to th' public-haase nor them shoon as yo' wear has taken yo' to th' church—an' that's sayin' a deal. Look at 'em! Their shap' 'ill tell yo' him as wears 'em doesnd walk straight. An' them next to 'em belongs to a punser.'

'What is a punser—a trade followed in the factory?'

'Nay, they like foller it all o'er. Sometimes they do a bit i' th' haase ; then th' wife's shins an' th' furniture come in for't. Sometimes they try it on i' th' street wi' th' bobby ; then they go to Preston. There's a good deal goes on i' th'

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football field when they mistak' one another's legs for th' leather.'

'Then it's not a trade?' asked the perplexed vicar.

'Yo' con call it what yo'n a mind. Some on 'em larn it up at th' Sheaf and Sickle.'

'You don't mean to say that the people kick one another with those iron-shod shoes?' said Mr. Denby, the truth beginning to dawn on a mind altogether ignorant of these customs of the new parish.

'Yo' have it naa,' said Elijah.

'Impossible!'

'There's another pair o' clogs yonder as peyles (bruises) a woman's shins welly every Saterdag neet, an's done it for more nor fifteen year. What done yo' think o' that, naa?' And Elijah reached forth the articles, and pushing them towards the vicar, said: 'Tak' a fair look at 'em; them's bruisers—them is; fit for Madam Tassau's.'

The vicar drew back.

'Yo've no need to be fear'd on 'em as long as he's noan wearin' 'em, an' yo're noan i' his gate.'



The vicar handled the ponderous shoon, at first gingerly, then with the fascination that weaves itself round instruments of torture. He looked with riveted eye on the heavy wooden soles—the sharp iron plates and the large nails with which they were studded. He raised them, turned them over, and ran his delicate finger along their keen edges. He thought of their force as missiles hurled through space, and multiplied that force as he imagined them battering rams on the end of a giant's foot—battering rams on a woman's flesh, too. Then, in disgust, he threw them down, and turning to Elijah said : ' Why do you repair them ? It's worse torture than the inquisition.'

' Aw've mended 'em for th' last time. Aw nobbud said to my missus, when th' woman brought 'em last neet, as aw'd never mend 'em no more.'

' The woman brought them, did she ?'

' Yi ; hoo awlus does. Aw'll tell yo' whod, Mr. Denby, there's no measurin' some women's love. Th' misses said to her : " What ! thaa'rt bringin' thi tormentors agen !" and hoo nobbud went red like, and left 'em on th' caanter, and

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said as hoo'd call for 'em when they wor mended.'

'And why does she live with such a brute?'

'Naa yo' ax a question it 'ud take a long while to tell yo'. But yo'll find aat summat abaat 'em afoore yo've bin so long i' th' parish.'

'Well, go on, Mr. Holt; you are introducing me to my parishioners in a very novel manner, I must say. Whose are these?' and the vicar took up a pair lying on the far end of the counter.

'Them? Why, him as wears 'em hasn't paid for 'em. He's one o' those sort as never pays for naught he gets. He's noan baat brass noather, but he believes noan i' givin' it fresh air. He's a close-fisted un, is owd Thew!'

'Is that his name?'

'He wor kessened (christened) Methuselah, but he never gets naught but Thew. They called him by th' reight name, for aw think he's never baan to dee—an' there's plenty on th' watch for his berryin', aw con tell yo'. There's noan so mony tears shed o'er them as has brass—leastways, it's so i' this country. But he's sin

a good mony on 'em aat—an' he's noan gone hissel' yet.'

'Do I understand you to say that "Thew," as you call him, pays for nothing he purchases?'

'Not unless yo' mak' him. An' when yo'n to throw as mich brass after a chap as he owes yo', an' th' bother i' th' bargain, an' when he's an awkward chap wi' a nasty tongue like Thew, why, yo' end i' leavin' him to hissel'. Jack Wilki'son—him as is bum-bailie (bailiff who distrains for debt)—were coming aat o' th' prayer-meetin' at aar chapel one neet, and owd Thew come up to him amang all th' folk and afoore th' parson an' o', an' said: "Aw'll gi' thee thi prayer, Jack, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner.'" "Haa's that?" axed Jack. "Because thaa't a publican—an' wur." Do yo' see? Jack had just caanty courted th' owd chap for his grocery score at Bond's.'

'Then Thew is in your fold—not mine?' laughingly interrogated the vicar.

'Yi; but there's some daan at yore shop as Jack Wilki'son has to look at naa an' agen. They're noan aboon runnin' long bills an' forgettin' to sattle 'em an' o'.'

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‘I dare say. No religious bodies, I suppose, can claim a monopoly of honesty.’

‘Nowe. Owd Judas still tak’s th’ Sacrament as he used to in his Maister’s time.’

At this stage of the conversation Asenath came in, and was not a little surprised to find the new vicar of the parish standing at the side of Elijah and handling the clogs. At first she was somewhat distant, for the pride of Dissent is as hard to tone as the pride of Episcopacy; and she was Methodist to the bone. Mr. Denby, however, soon drew the woman out of her sectarian reserve by thanking her for the kindnesses shown to his little son, who, he said, was always eager to spend his spare moments at her husband’s shop.

‘Aw hope th’ Lord ’ll spare him to yo’. He’s brought some breetness to aar haase, aw con tell yo’. Yo’ see, we lost aars. He come late to us—a flaar i’ autumn like—i’ ’Lijah’s autumn an’ mine, aw mean. We thought we should ha’ had him to comfort us i’ aar owd age; but he deed, poor lad! afoore he blossomed. An’ yo’re Percy favors (resembles) him, an’ we like see Sam’l o’er agen sin’ he come.

'Lijah here sez as God's sent a substitute. But, after o', there's noan like aar own. Yo'd be ill off if aught happened that little lad o' yores, Mr. Denby.'

The pathos of the woman's speech went straight to the vicar's heart. Depth of feeling held words in abeyance, and for a little while he looked through the doorway towards the moors beyond; then, controlling himself, he said :

'I'm glad Percy has been a messenger of joy. But he's not my only Percy. I have one in heaven—one who died the day the Percy you know was born. In a few hours—nay, minutes—a life was granted and a life withdrawn.'

Then Elijah rose from his stool, and, going up to the vicar, said :

'Methody or no Methody, aw con tak to yo' naa, Mr. Denby. Will yo' give me yore hand?' And the hands of the vicar and clogger clasped across the counter, and they twain were one man.

'There's summat grand abaat sorrow,' said Asenath, as she watched the two men. 'It beats all for makin' folk at one like. Them

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as sups it forgets their cloathes, an' brass, an' religion, an o'; an' it taks a good deal for some folk to forget that—leastways, i' these parts, Mr. Denby. Aw've getten a deal nearer to folk sin' aar Sam'l deed nor aw ever did afoore.'

'You mean the sorrow of bereavement, Mrs. Holt?'

'Yi; aw durnd mean sorrow o'er losin' brass. But there is them as frets a deal more o'er their divy (lapsed dividends in factories) nor they do o'er their childer. They put their little uns i' th' hoile (grave) wi' no more of a do nor berryin' 'tatoes.'

'Aw'll tell yo' what's plagued me a deal, Mr. Denby. If yo'll tak' a walk raand th' churchyard, yo'll see mony a mound o'er them as has deed broken-hearted o'er a bit o' brass, but noan so mony o'er them as has deed broken-hearted o'er berryin' their childer. Naa, haa is it, think yo'?''

The vicar offered no solution.

'Shall aw tell yo' whad aw think abaat it?'

'I should like to hear,' said the vicar.

'Well, aw reckon it up i' this feshion.

Childer come a deal too quick i' these parts; an' as soon as them as has 'em get aat a bed, they're off to th' factory agen to their wark. Mothers, as they co' theirsels, has no time to gi' to their babbies; it's warkin' an' sleepin', an' th' little uns are put aat to the owd women—grandmothers, and sich like—onywhere to be aat o' th' gate. Mr. Denby, aw've fun aat 'at it's home 'at mays (makes) folk love their own, an' th' factories has killed home for a lot o' folk—yi, welly as much as th' public-haases, though aw'm a teetotaller as sez it. A child as groos up aatside yo' is never what aw co' a child o' yore heart. Naa, aw'm happen wrang, but that's as aw reckon it up.'

The vicar walked home with a dawning light in his mind, having gained more knowledge of his parish and of his parishioners from a morning's chat with Elijah than from all his observations of the last six weeks. He began to see the originality and honesty that lay behind the bluntness and rudeness of those who so fearlessly spoke to him, and was just mastering enough of the vernacular to relish the wit that seasoned their speech. Taking all in all,

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he was not despondent as to his new cure—indeed, he felt his chances the greater because he saw everywhere that among his people character was more than sect; and reaching the vicarage, he told his wife of his parishioners Elijah and Asenath Holt, and of the introduction they had given him to those among whom he was called to minister.



THEOLOGY IN A CLOGGER'S SHOP.



## THEOLOGY IN A CLOGGER'S SHOP.

'THAA'RT still at it, aw see, 'Lijah. What a mon thaa art for wark, forshure!'

'What else would ta have me be, Yeb?'

'Rest thisel' a bit. Thaa'rt gettin' owd, thaa knows.'

'Aw should get owd a deal sooner if aw did naught, like some o' yo'. It's wark, thaa knows, 'at keeps folk young.'

'Depends on what sort it is, 'Lijah.'

'Ony sort, lad, if it's honest.'

'Thee come to mind a mule for twenty year, an' thaa'll nod talk i' that feshion. Aw've done aboon my share, aw con tell thi, an' aw'm baan to let others do theirs naa.'

In these days of toil to which Yeb referred, his work was to follow the spinning-frames in the factory known as mules; but now, with a

family of grown-up girls, all of them weavers in receipt of good wages, he rested from his labours, letting those work for him for whom he worked in the days of their childhood. He was what they called 'a chap as did naught'; but this was not altogether true, for day by day he indulged much in gossip and in drink. Loud of voice, ready in wit, coarse in jest, and rough when in his cups, he was a product of manufacturing village life. In the plethora of his animal spirits he was counted as good-natured, but he possessed a hasty temper that made him enemies not a few. He was boastful, and yet a coward; and when his chance came with those weaker than himself, he could be cruel.

'Aw'll tell thi whod, Yeb. Thaa'd be a better mon if thaa worked a bit more,' said Elijah.

'An' thaa'd be no wur if thaa worked a bit less, 'Lijah.'

'Haa doesto mak' that aat, Yeb?'

'Why, thaa sees, it's i' this road. Them as does o'er mich is never reight wi' them as does less than theirsels.'

'But there's so mony on yo' as does so little, 'at if some on us didn't do a bit "o'er mich," as thaa co's it, th' owd world 'ud stan' still, an' there'd be a deal more clammin' (starving) nor there is.'

'Ey, 'Lijah! there's no stanin' agen thy wit. Thaa wor made for summat better nor cloggin'.'

'Aw durnd think so, Yeb. Aw've yerd thee say 'at a felley can do naught better nor keep folk feet warm. If yo' ged wrang there yo're wrang all o'er, yo' know. Aw'd rather have a dry foot nor a full inside, ony day.'

'Aw durnd know as aw would, 'Lijah.'

'Not when thaa'rt at th' Sheaf and Sickle?' said Elijah, with a twinkling eye.

'Thaa's no need to laugh. Aw'm as fond o' mi meat as ony o' yo'. An' aw'm noan ashamed on't, noather.'

'An' o' thi drink an' o'?'

'Well, aw'm noan a teetotal. An' aw'm noan baan to be. Aw durnd stan' i' th' way o' thi tay an' watter. An' aw'm noan baan to let thee stan' i' mine o'er a soup (drink) o' ale. So thaa's no need to preych thi teetotal stuff to me—doesto yer?'

‘Yi, aw yer, lad!’ And Elijah bent over his clog.

As Elijah hammered and sweat at his work, Yeb silently drew at his pipe, and filled the low-ceiled shop with wreaths of smoke, pausing now and again to grunt his disgust at his friend’s hints as to his bibulous tendencies, which he could not forgive.

In a little while the sound of a stick on the pavement caught his ear, and turning towards Elijah, he said: ‘Yon’s Iron-yers (iron ears), aw bet.’

‘Iron-ears’—so called because he was deaf—was an asthmatic who, though he professed to hear nothing, knew everything throughout the whole countryside. There were people who said that when he lost his ears he found his wits. Others declared he played the deaf man to gratify his voracious curiosity. At any rate, he was both *Morning Chronicle* and *Evening News*; and his daily place of call was the clogger’s shop.

Yeb was right, for in another moment old Iron-ears darkened the doorway of the shop, announcing his presence by a number of harsh

chest-sounds, interrupted by a succession of short, catchy coughs, his breathing resembling the bellows sounds of a smithy fire.

When he had pulled himself together, and wiped his bald brow with a remnant of calico-piece which he carried by way of handkerchief, he drew out the end of a clay, and turning to Yeb, said :

‘Hasto gotten ony on thi?’ In response to which Yeb threw him a highly polished brass tobacco-box, saying : ‘Help thisel’.

Deaf as he was, Iron-ears seemed to detect the sounds, for he at once pressed the spring of the lid, and drew from the box a plentiful supply of twist, black and wormlike. This he first cut with his knife on the shop-counter, then rubbed between the palms of his hands, slowly filling the bowl of the attenuated pipe and commencing to smoke.

‘’Bacca’s good for asthma. It ’ud do thee good, ’Lijah, if thaa’d tak’ to’t agen.’

‘Is it good for deafness, doesto think? for thaa tak’s aboon thi share on’t—leastways, thaa does when thaa’s Yeb’s bacca-box to pool at.’

But Iron-ears smoked on stolidly. Then, looking round at Elijah, he said :

‘Didto speak?’

There was another period of silence, in which Yeb and Iron-ears drew long breaths at their pipes, the pungent flavour of the twist plaguing the bronchial tubes of Elijah, and forcing him to desist from his labours to cough.

‘An’ yo’ yerd ought, lads?’ asked Iron-ears, the silence becoming unendurable to his busy mind.

Yeb and Elijah shook their heads, the one looking calmly through the smoke-rings at the dingy ceiling, the other hammering away at his clog, both knowing full well that the way to rouse the loquacity of Iron-ears was to assume indifference towards him and his news.

‘Yo’ yer naught up here, ’Lijah, naa-a-days. But aw should ha’ thought as Yeb here would ha’ yerd.’

Still the men, though waiting with itching ears, showed no sign of curiosity.

‘Aw durnd know what we’re comin’ to. There’s summat wrang somewhere. Things has altered a deal sin’ aw were a lad.’

But there was no response save the tap, tap of



Elijah's hammer and the occasional clearance of Yeb's throat.

'Then yo'n yerd naught abaat aar parson, hav' yo'?'

At this Elijah looked up, for Iron-ears' parson was his parson as well—both were Methodists.

'What abaat th' parson?' blazed out Elijah into the deaf man's ear.

'Didto speak?' queried Iron-ears.

'Yi! Aw say, What abaat aar parson?'

'Aw've said naught agen th' parson. Aw nobbud said han yo' yerd naught?'

'Aw never yerd naught good about parsons yet,' interrupted Yeb. 'They say a deal too mich, and get a deal too mich for th' sayin' on't, to my likin'.'

'Let th' parsons a' be, Yeb. They never did thee any hurt.'

'Nowe, 'Lijah—an' for a good reason an o'. Aw never gav' 'em chance.'

As Iron-ears did not incline to speak further about the parson, or of the reports concerning him, the two men relapsed into their former silence, Yeb continuing to smoke and Elijah tapping away at his clog.

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‘Doesto think, ‘Lijah, as we’re baan to be sold o’er to th’ papises (papists)?’ asked Iron-ears.

‘What mak’s thee ax that question?’ shouted Elijah.

‘Naught mich,’ wheezed the old man.

There was another spell of silence, Iron-ears waiting to draw the two listeners; and they, weary of playing their part in the waiting game, chafing under the restraint they knew in a little while would loose the deaf man’s tongue. At last their patience was rewarded, for, turning towards them again, he said :

‘Yo’n yerd naught, then, abaat th’ parson’s lad?’

‘Nowe. Has he wed a factory lass, or summat?’ asked Yeb.

‘A deal wur nor that, lad,’ was the old man’s reply.

Yeb took the pipe from his lips, and gazed with gaping mouth, and Elijah laid down his clog, and looked the question he dared not ask.

At this juncture Elijah’s wife came on the scene. She had seen Iron-ears enter the shop, and groaned in spirit to know what bit of

gossip he was retailing. What she heard piqued her already strained curiosity, and, going up to the old man's ear, she shouted : 'What is't?'

'Thaa may weel ax "What is't?" lass. Aar parson's lad geet confirmed at St. Luke's yester afternun !'

'What! A Methody parson's lad confirmed at church—an' aar parson an' o'! He's never have a farthin' o' mi brass agen. Aw'm noan baan to pay to mak' papises.'

'What mun he geet confirmed for?' asked Elijah.

'Isn't his faither as good as th' bishop ony day?' indignantly protested Elijah's wife. 'It's come to summat when aar own's ashamed on us!'

'That's what aw say,' wheezed Iron-ears, into whose deaf organs this conversation was shouted—'that's what aw say. What's sauce for th' goose is sauce for th' gander.'

'Yi, but it's th' goslin' this time, thaa knows, interrupted Yeb.

'Yi, an' what's sauce for th' gander is sauce for the goslin' an' o',' said Iron-ears, 'if yo'll nobbud let me speak.'

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‘ Bless thee, lass,’ continued Yeb, determined, now his knife was in a tender spot, to twist it round—‘ bless thee, lass, the parson’s nobbud lookin’ up i’ th’ world. Clogs maks for boots, thaa knows, and Methodies mak’ for th’ Church.’

Yeb’s reference to clogs was unfortunate. It roused the pride of Elijah’s wife, who looked on her husband’s trade as one of high-class respectability, and, turning to him, she said :

‘ Aw’d have thee know, Yeb, as my maister’s trade’s as good as thine, ony day—and, for that, a vast sight better. Thaa’d look a deal better if thaa’d work a bit more nor thaa does, i’stead o’ lettin’ them lasses o’ thine work to keep thee i’ idleness.’

‘ Naa, come, ’Senath, durnd tak’ on like that. Aw wor sayin’ naught agen clogs. Aw wor nobbud sayin’ that i’ this world as folk get up a bit, they gi’ o’er wearing clogs an’ tak’ to shoon. An’ aw’ve lived long enough to find aat that clogs go to th’ chapel and shoon to th’ church. Dun yo’ see?’

‘ Yi, aw see. Happen thaa’rt reight an’ o’.’

‘ Can ony o’ yo’ tell a chap what confirmation is?’ asked Iron-cars.

'It's summat same as what we call convarasion,' replied Elijah.

'There's mony roads o' gettin' to heaven,' sarcastically interrupted Yeb.

'Thee mind thaa doesn't miss 'em all, lad.'

'Aw durnd know as aw shall ax thee to show me ony of 'em, 'Senath, an' aw'm sure aw shall ax noan o' th' parsons.'

'Con ony o' yo' tell me what confirmation is?' again shouted Iron-ears, who heard not this theological wrangling, and deemed himself insulted at what he took to be the indifference of the company to his question.

'Con—var—si—on!' bawled Yeb at the top of his voice, and in the tympanum of the deaf man's ear—'con—var—si—on!'

'Aw thought as mich. But th' lad wor convarted. He geet "brought in" (converted) at th' revival last winter but one.'

'Happen he wor like some more as aw know.'

'What's that?' asked Elijah's wife.

'Happen he wanted convartin' o'er agen.'

'Howd thi nasty tongue!' said the woman. 'Thaa ought to shame o' makin' fun o' sichlike things.'

'Why, 'Senath, thaa knows aw'm reight. There's owd Neddy Brimrod been converted more nor forty times. He sez he has hissel'; and he tell'd me t'other neet i' th' Sheaf and Sickle 'at if he lives long enough he means to be converted as mony times agen. He sez he tak's to it, like.'

Thaa'rt goin' a bit o'er far, Yeb. Aw con do wi' a crack (a joke), but not o'er sacred things, thaa knows. Aw believe i' a chap follerin' his lights. An' if th' parson's lad can do more good wi' gettin' confirmed, then aw should be th' last to raise mi hond agen him; but his faither 'll hav' no more brass o' mine.'

It was now the vicar's son came bounding into the shop—'God's substitute,' as Elijah called him—and, turning to him, that good man said:

'Bless thee, thaa'rt just th' lad we want. Wor aar parson's son confirmed at thi faither's church yesterday?'

'Yes,' said the boy; 'I was there and saw him.'

'Worn'd his own good enough for him, little un?' asked Yeb—'not respectable like?'

'He wants to be a missionary, father says, in our Church Missionary Society, but he couldn't be without being confirmed.'

'Brass agen!' cried the irrepressible Yeb. 'Parsons is o' alike—it's awlus what's at th' end on't.'

The boy flushed, and, turning on Yeb, he cried :

'You bad man! I'll tell my father what you say!'

'And what will your father do, little turkey-cock, ey? Happen he'll want to mak' a missionary o' me and o'.'

'If thaa speaks to th' lad agen i' that fashion, aw'll put thee out o' th' shop—so naa thaa knows, Yeb,' said Elijah, rising from his stool, and colouring up to the roots of his hair. 'Remember Him as said, "Take heed that ye despise not one o' these little uns."'

'So thaa's taken to quotin' Scripter naa, hasto, 'Lijah? Well, aw cornd stan' that.'

'Nowe; there wor another as couldn't beside thee,' said the sharp-tongued Asenath, who now took the part of the boy, in whose eyes the tears were gathering. 'Come here, my darlin';'

and, drawing him to her side, she stroked his hair and kissed him.

‘So he’s getten converted o’er agen, has he?’ said Iron-ears, partly to himself, and on whom a confused conception of confirmation had broken—‘getten converted o’er agen, has he? Well, he’ll happen be th’ better for’t—let’s hope so, at ony rate.’

‘And he’s going to be a missionary in Africa,’ said the boy, stealing up to the ear of the old man, and speaking in shrill, childish tones.

‘What doesto say, little un? Thaa mun speak up—aw’m deaf.’

‘He’s going to be a missionary in Africa—where black people live, you know.’

‘Will he open ony fresh markets for th’ factories, thinksto, little un?’

‘I’ll ask father—he’ll know.’

‘Durnd thee trouble thi faither about ony sich nonsense, Percy. Iron-ears has some shares i’ th’ factory, thaa knows, and he thinks a deal too mich o’ th’ markets, that’s o’, so good neet, little un;’ and Asenath, once more kissing the boy, bade him go home. Then, turning to Yeb, she said: ‘Yeb, never thee sneer afore



childer. It's bad enough to mak' gam' (game) o' religion afore grown-up folk, but him as does it afore a child o'erfaces th' devil hissel'. If thaa wants to spit thaa's no need to do it on a clean floor; thaa con go aatside to do it. Thaa'd better draan thisel' i' th' mill lodge nor go on as thaa's done afore yon child—leastways, th' Maister said so.'

'Thaa'rt a gradely talker, 'Senath. Th' vicar had better mak' a missionary o' thee an' o'.'

'If th' missionaries hav' to praich to a wur lot nor yo', then aw pity 'em.'

'What are yo' talkin' abaat?' asked Iron-ears.

'Aw'm nobbud tellin' Yeb here 'at if th' heathen are wur nor he is, them as preyches to 'em 'll want confirming or summat.'

'Aw'm same road o' thinkin' as yo', 'Senath,' said Iron-ears. 'Yeb's both "stiff-necked and uncircumcised," as th' Scriptor sez.'

'Yo' Methodies is a bonny lot for banging th' Bible abaat folk yeds. If aw were yo', aw'd preych less an' practise more.'

'Eyt wi' th' same spoon thaa'rt feedin' us wi',

Yeb,' said Elijah. 'Thaa'rt abaat as ill a practiser as aw know; but thaa does a deal o' talkin'.'

'Tha sees, 'Lijah, aw'm noan a perfesser.'

'That means thaa con do as thaa likes, an' no one mun speak to thee. It's a yessy thing to be baat a religion, Yeb. There's no strait gates an' narro' roads th' way thaa travels.'

'What doesto say, lass?' cried Iron-ears, who was straining to catch the conversation between Yeb and Asenath. 'What doesto say?'

'Why, Yeb here sez 'at he perfesses naught, an' aw wor nobbud tellin' him he'd a yessy time on't. It's a chep (cheap) religion is his.'

'Yigh,' groaned the deaf man. 'Them as hes naught con loise naught.'

'An' what abaat them as mak's aat they hev summat, an' hasn't—ey? Smoke that i' your pipe, owd lad;' and so saying, Yeb gave Iron-ears a significant nod.

'What's he sayin' abaat mi pipe, Asenath?'

'He sez naught abaat thi pipe, like; it's thee, an' me, an' 'Lijah here, he's talkin' abaat.'

'An' what does he say? Sezto?'

'As we mak' aat as we've summat when we've gotten naught.'

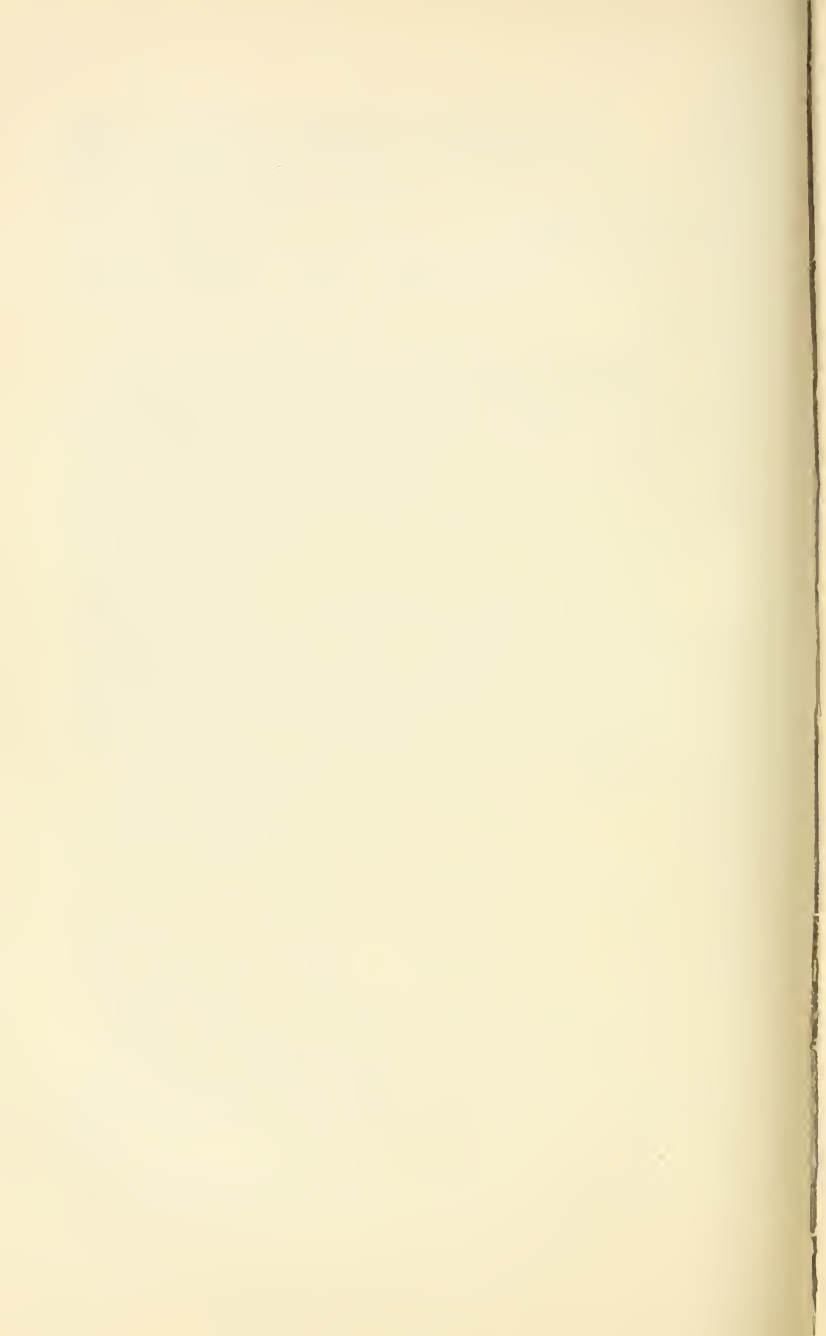
'What hasto gotten, Yeb?' asked the old man.

'Naught, as aw know on.'

'Well, thaa con speyk for thisel'; but durnd thee put thi hond into mi pocket, that's all.'

'Nor into mine, noather,' said Elijah; 'an' if we've nobbud gotten th' one talent, we're none baan to berry it i' a hoile as thaa'rt doing.'

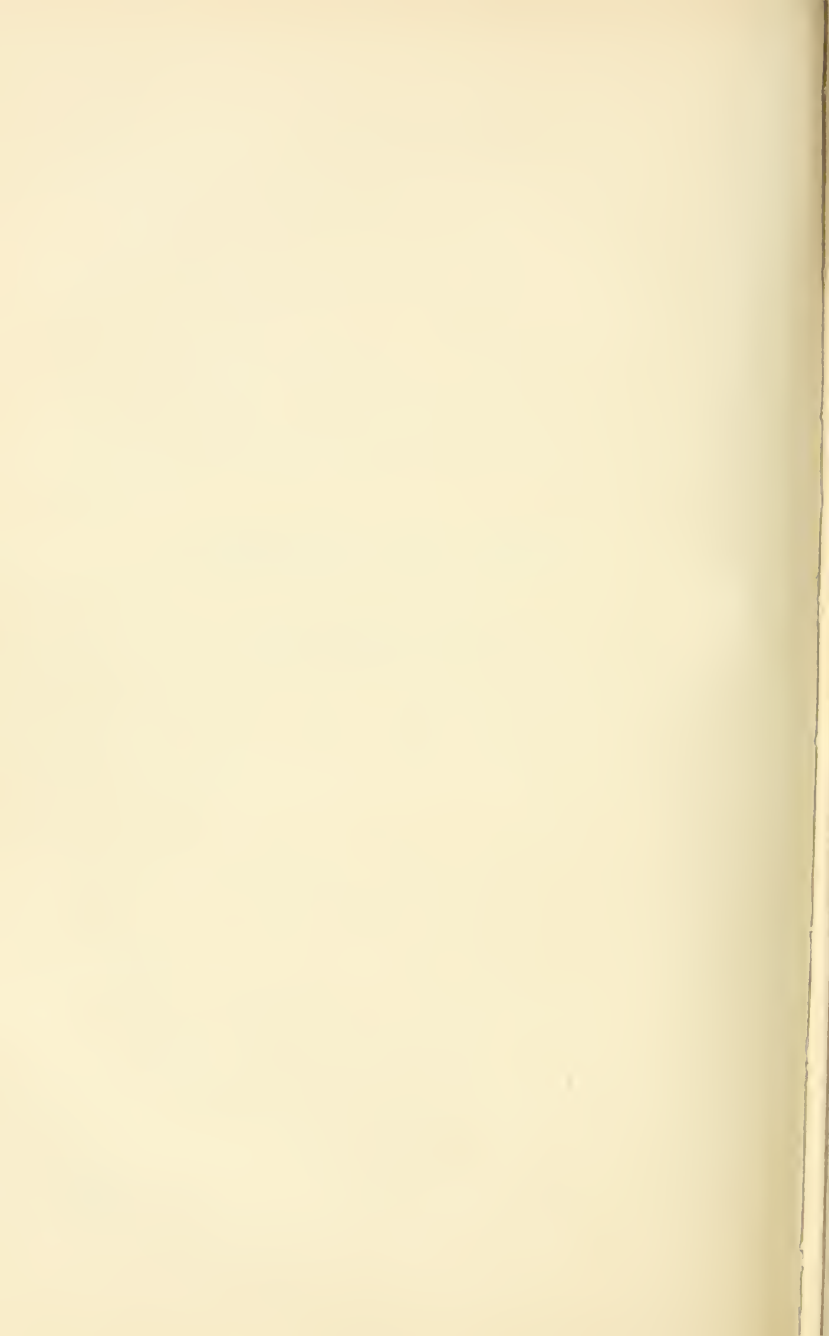
'Scripter agen!' cried Yeb; 'what folk yo' Methodies are for Scripter!' And filling his pipe, he walked musingly to the Sheaf and Sickle to repeat the story of the parson's son and his confirmation.



## ENOS THE EXORCIST.

I. A STRANGE TENANT.

II. A FORSAKEN SOUL.



## I.

### A STRANGE TENANT.

‘WHOSE ta’n th’ Lone Haase?’ asked Iron-ears at one of the morning councils at the clogger’s shop.

‘Aw didn’t know as it were ta’n,’ replied Yeb, drawing savagely at his dying pipe.

‘Yi, but it is; an’ he’s a queer un that’s ta’n it. A long-legged felley, wi’ his yure (hair) daan his shou’ders, and a sken (squint) like a foomert (polecat).’

‘Well, thaa draws a bonny picter on him, an’ no mistak’,’ said Elijah.

‘Where didto see him?’ shouted Yeb into the deaf man’s ears.

‘Where did aw see him? Why, I see’d him diggin’ i’ th’ garden up at the Lone Haase, forshure. Where didto think aw’d see him?’

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‘A tramp weyver, happen,’ suggested old Tic-tak, the itinerant clock-mender ; to which suggestion Iron-ears shook his head, saying :

‘He doesn’d stoop enough for a weyver.’

‘A furriner (suspected stranger) aw’ll war’nd.’

‘Yi ; some rubbidge o’ that mak’ (sort).’

‘When did th’ chap come, thinksto?’ asked Yeb of the deaf man.

‘Neet afore last. He brought th’ key o’er wi’ him fro’ Dene. Th’ squire’s agent lives there, thaa knows.’

‘Well, aw wish him luck i’ that hoile. It’s bin an ill day for them as ever lived theer i’ my time. They say there’s blood on th’ walls, an’ aw’m noan so sure but they’re reight.’

The Lone House, as it was called, stood on a projection of scarped cliff at the bend of the moors, and looked down, like a weird watcher, on the valley below. It was fringed by a disused road, and fenced in from the open by a little waste of garden, in which tangled briars and long weeds lay writhing and knotted in forlorn confusion. At the back stood a clump of trees, long since sapless, through the leafless



branches of which in sunniest days the wind wailed as if in terror of its nearness to this deserted shadow of the past. It was a spot forsaken. None came near it from choice. Swallows had long since ceased to build under its eaves, and straying sheep were never known to wander near its enclosure. Tenants there had been, but they were few and far between—uncanny and silent, coming from no one knew where, and thither returning. Around it had settled an air of mystery—nay, an atmosphere of dread superstition—so much so that the house was as seldom talked of as it was seldom visited. No wonder, then, the gossipers at the Sign of the Wooden Shoon were somewhat awed at the announcement made by Iron-ears.

And who was the strange tenant? and how came he to seek this forsaken spot?

Three days prior to Iron-ears' story, told in the clogger's shop, a tall, gaunt man, erect and swift of foot, had skirted the moors at evening, as the wind began to moan on the long ridges of heather and rush, and stir with chill breath the dark waters in the peaty pools. He threw a furtive glance to right and left, and would

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look from time to time over his shoulder as though in dread of one who followed. As he walked on alone the setting sun threw a giant shadow from his form—a shadow that swept for many a yard the waste, and startled the wild fowl, and set off at a scamper the wondering flocks. In one hand he carried an old-fashioned carpet-bag, the coloured pattern of which was faded with exposure to many storms, while in his other hand he clenched a strong thorn, which from time to time he dug with savage blows into the yielding ground. His hair, as Iron-ears had told the gossips at the clogger's, was long, and to the wildness of his eye was lent the horrible squint.

Coming to a ridge on the moors from which the village was visible, he paused to watch it disappear in the folding mists of evening. The gray smoke from a hundred chimneys was curling lazily, and lights began to glimmer from the homestead windows, telling of comfort strangely in contrast with the lonesomeness of the moors. Half a mile below stood the ungainly gables of the little chapel where Elijah worshipped, and from it came the sounds of a

hymn sung by lusty men—a hymn, too, familiar to the wanderer's ears.

Stealthily he descended the slope, welcoming the gathering night, at each step the sounds of the hymn growing clearer. Then followed a prayer, loud and importunate—a prayer of uncultured sincerity—a prayer of the hills. To the wanderer's heart it came in tones as magical as those of harmony to the heart of a musician. A light broke from his eyes, the haunted look left his face, and he crept towards the chapel, hiding under an adjacent tomb that he might the better hear, and hear unobserved.

It was the service of illiterate men ; this the educated sense of the stranger at once detected ; but his religious instinct told him it was the service of men of power. He took in every word, his heart beating faster to the ejaculations of the worshippers, and warming to the oft-sung verses that punctuated the prayers. Long after the service was over he remained among the tombs, at times talking wildly, and beating the air with his thorn stick, then falling down, and crying incoherently on God. As night fell he

climbed the heights to the Lone House, which he entered, shutting-to the door on his desolation. Such was the strange tenant whose presence old Iron-ears had discovered.

‘Aw would like to know who he is, and what he wants,’ said Iron-ears, continuing his conversation. ‘There’s summat abaat him as seems noan reight.’

‘Up to some mak’ o’ mischief, aw bet. Them furriners is a bad lot. It were an ill day when they started a-comin’ i’ these parts,’ said Yeb.

‘There’s happen summat good abaat th’ chap, after all, lads,’ mildly rebuked Elijah. ‘Yo’ know, we’re to think no evil, and we’re noan to judge—ey, Yeb? Th’ old Book sez so, doesn’d it?’

‘Th’ owd Book, as yo’ co’ it, is naught i’ mi line, ’Lijah. Aw’m no Methody.’

*‘Then what are you?’*

The voice was unexpected and sepulchral, and the men in the shop started as if spoken to by one from the dead. Yeb’s pipe fell out of his mouth on the floor and broke, scattering

the ashes and lighted plug of tobacco from the bowl. Elijah dropped the clog on which he was at work. Even Iron-ears heard, and turned a shade of colour on his own bronzed face; while Tic-tak made for the door in which the stranger stood whose voice and question had so startled the group.

It did not take long, however, before these hardy sons of the hills recovered their self-possession, and in a bullying tone Yeb answered the stranger's question by saying :

'Aw durnd know as it matters to yo' what aw am.'

'Brother, it matters much.'

'Durnd jaw me wi' your Methody linge 'Lijah here's a brother, or whatever yo' co' 'em i' yore religion. But aw'm noan one o' that sort, and aw durnd mean to be. So yo' can put that i' your pipe and smoke it.'

'I don't use tobacco, my brother.' And then, putting his foot on the fallen pipe and expiring weed that were lying on the floor, he said : 'Thy idol is trodden under foot.'

'An' aw'll do as mich for thee wi' mi foot!' cried the infuriated Yeb; and had not Elijah

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interfered, the stranger would have been kicked into the street.

‘Hear ye not the voice: “Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm”?’

‘Aw yer thaa’t wrong i’ thi yed? What ’sylum hasta come fro’?’

The stranger looked at Yeb with a burning fire in his eye. Not the fire of anger—that the old sceptic could have withstood; but it was an unearthly, searching fire, and Yeb let his glance fall on the ground.

Turning to Elijah, he said :

‘Thou art of the Lord’s people—I read it in thy face. Thy voice, too, I heard at the hour of prayer. Thou art a chosen vessel.’

Then, turning to Iron-ears, he said :

‘And what art thou, brother?’

‘He’s deef,’ answered Yeb.

‘Ah! “The ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.”’

‘If thaa con mak’ him yer, thaa’rt a clever un, an’ no mistak’.’

‘All things are possible to God, brother.’

‘Howd thi din! Aw’m noan thi brother, aw tell thee!’ And Yeb pushed past the

stranger with an oath, to hurry with his news to the Sheaf and Sickle.

“Swear not at all,” was the solemn rebuke of the stranger.

Elijah had been looking at the face. It was a noble face, shadowed by a haunted look that would have kindled pity in the hardest heart. The brow was high, the nose aquiline, the mouth refined and closely-drawn—but the eyes! Elijah could not look into them. There was the horrible squint and the unearthly fire, while over all there was the cast of dread; and even as he stood erect before the men a constant glance was thrown over his shoulder—a glance of nervous, anticipatory fear.

‘Yo’re a stranger i’ these parts?’ interrogated Elijah.

“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels un-awares,” was the reply.

Elijah thought of angels of darkness, and a chill came over him.

‘Speak thy thought, brother. Thinkest thou that I am a messenger of Satan?’ And the speaker threw another furtive glance across his

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shoulder ; then, starting as if in terror, he fell writhing on the floor.

At one bound Elijah leapt the counter, and found himself several yards from his shop-door, while Iron-ears, pale as death, fled into the farthest corner, being barred egress by the fallen form.

For upwards of a minute the stranger seemed to wrestle with an unseen foe. Rolling over, he beat the stone floor with his knuckles till they were bruised and bleeding, and fastened his teeth into a strip of leather that was near him, chewing it like pulp. Strange words fell from his lips—words that fought for utterance with choking foam — while beads of perspiration rolled off his brow. Rallying from the paroxysm, he wiped the moisture from his face, a light of gladness banishing the haunted look. Then, walking towards Elijah, he put out his hand, and said :

‘ Fear not. “ He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, *and I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life,*” ’ the last words being uttered in tones of ringing triumph ; and, with a farewell wave of his



lengthy arm, he strode off in the direction of the Lone House.

It was not long before the whole village was agog. Yeb had roused the idlers at the Sheaf and Sickle, and Elijah's leap into the street brought a dozen pairs of wondering eyes to as many doors and windows.

'What's up, 'Lijah? is th' shop o' fire?' cried a loud-voiced woman with a glance for the curious.

'Thaa'd better come an' see, lass. Onyroad, owd Iron-yers is inside somewhere, an' aw'm ill off abaat him.'

A crowd soon gathered round the door, and with great trepidity Elijah looked in, but Iron-ears was not to be seen.

'He's ta'n him, aw bet,' groaned Elijah.

'Who's ta'n him? What doesto mean?' cried the woman who first addressed Elijah.

Then the clogger rallied himself and went into the shop, but nowhere could he see his friend.

'Sithee,' cried the woman at his side. 'Sithee, there's a pair o' clogs yonder wi' stockin's and trousers to 'em'; and, looking in

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the direction in which she pointed, Elijah saw Iron-ears' legs protruding from a side of leather. Lifting it, there lay the old man, with scarcely breath left to wheeze out :

‘Has he goan?’

‘Yi,’ said Elijah, as frightened as his hiding friend.

‘Then aw'm off an' o'!’ And Iron-ears walked home with the nimble step of a boy, declaring that ‘th' devil hissel' wor th' tenant o' th' Lone Haase.’

That night sundry councils were held as to what should be done with the tenant of the Lone House. The police were seen, but refused to interfere, satisfied that the stranger was respectable and had merely suffered from a fit. A deputation waited on ‘Owd Harry,’ as he was called—the magistrate—but he laughed at the story. The vicar was appealed to, and satisfied himself by referring the case to one of religious mania.

At the Sheaf and Sickle there was great clamour and much ale consumed. Yeb was the hero, and greatly exaggerated the story. He dwelt much on the stranger's squint, and

swore that his breath was strong with the fumes of brimstone. Indeed, he went so far as to call the stranger 'Owd Brimston,' and expressed his indignation that he should be addressed by him as 'my brother,' declaring that he was 'not o' that breed yet.'

Now, there dwelt in Heatherlow a patriarchal man of the name of Enos—Enos Moorfield. He was the oldest Methodist in the village—a good man, one against whom no word was ever spoken, and one in whom both good and bad alike believed. In almost all cases of illness he was sent for, and when infection spread, and visitors were scared away from the bedside of the sick, he was always there, whispering his words of love. There was a regal benignity about the old man. His face, plebeian in cast, was redeemed by that seraphic light that used to catch the eye of the mediæval painter; and his voice, while in no way oily or unctuous, touched tender chords in all hearts. He was uncultured, never having written his name throughout his four-score years. And he knew barely enough of letters to match the children in the lowest class. But he possessed an insight into the

human heart, and, to use his own Methodist phraseology, 'He knew whom he had believed.' In all vexing questions he was the final court of appeal in Heatherlow, and, as he used to say, 'He settled th' job wi' prayer.' It was to old Enos that Elijah and his friends at last turned, and into his ears told their startling story.

'Aw think aw know what it is, lads,' said he, after listening to the tale. 'It's a case o' possession. Aw con remember 'em when aw wor a lad — when th' revivals wor agate. We've noan had so mony lat'ly i' these parts, thank God! But that's noan to say as we shaln'd hav' 'em agen. This kind, yo' know, goeth not forth but by prayer and fastin'. Yo' made a mistak' i' going to th' perlece; it's noan a job for th' court haase, it's for th' Almeety to sattel, and not th' magistrate. Aw'll hav' a word or two wi' Him mysel' and yer what He sez. Yo' con stop here whol aw come daan agen.' And Enos left them, to enter into his chamber for prayer.

The men who waited on Enos were now left alone, and as the minutes passed their expectancy grew more strained. Each knew the old

man would return to them with a solution, for he was never appealed to without proving his many resources. Yet, how he would deal with the mad tenant of the Lone House they could not tell. His remarks also about 'possession' greatly vexed them.

Time passed slowly. The minutes gave out the quarter, and the quarter lent itself to the half-hour herald from the clock, yet Enos remained in his chamber in prayer.

'Th' owd lad's wrostlin' (wrestling), yer thee?' said Elijah, as sounds came from the chamber above—sounds as of someone rolling over the floor and uttering deep groans.

'Yi! Happen he's straitened in hissel'. He's noan liberty,' replied another of the sect.

'Let's help him a bit wi' a hymn. Naa, Jerry, strike up "Sov-ren-i-ty" to "Moses and 'Lijah."'

Whereupon the man spoken to as Jerry threw himself back in his chair, and closing his eyes, struck up the old tune to a hymn in which there was reference to the two prophets, the refrain being .

'Let Moses in the spirit groan,  
And God cries out, "Let Me alone."'

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These two lines were sung again and again with growing vehemence, until the excitement became wild, the singers rocking themselves to the time of the tune, and beating with their hands to the rhythm of the words.

‘Give it band, lads!’ cried out the man who suggested the hymn as a source of help to Enos, ‘give it band (let it go)!’ And the refrain waxed fast and furious.

When the singing was at its height a great shout was heard overhead, and a heavy thud sounded on the floor as of a man leaping.

‘He’s gotten it!’ cried Jerry (got an answer to his prayer). Then the men ceased singing, and clamoured, ‘Hallelujah! Hallelujah!’

Just then the shining face of Enos was seen at the staircase doorway, his cheery voice exclaiming: ‘Yo’re reight, lads: aw’ve gotten it. There’s naught like prayer for movin’ th’ Al-meety.’

‘What do yo’ mak’ on it, Enos?’ asked Elijah.

‘It’s as aw tow’d yo’—a case o’ possession. Th’ poor chap’s delivered o’er to th’ bonds o’ Satan. He’s i’ th’ claws o’ the roarin’ lion—

bun captive by the devil. Let's go and pray for him.'

'Where mun we pray?' asked the men.

'Up at th' Lone Haase,' was the reply of Enos. 'There's naught like feytin' th' devil on his own graand.'

'Aw'm noan baan to th' Lone Haase,' said Jerry.

'Nor me noather,' cried another stalwart champion of the faith.

'We mut as weel pray here, Enos,' suggested Elijah.

'Yo' con stop and pray where yo've a mind. Aw'm baan to beard th' owd lion i' his own den. Aw'm none feard o' th' devil onywhere, or i' ony shap (shape). So here goes.' And putting on his coat and hat, he went out into the night to find his way to the Lone House alone.

## II.

### A FORSAKEN SOUL.

It was a sultry autumn night. Clouds covered the moon, and a dead atmosphere hung over the valley.

‘There’s baan to be a storm, Enos. Aw think if aw wor thee aw’d stop a’ whom. Th’ Lord ’ill yer thi prayers as weel daan here as up yon.’

‘Aw’m baan to th’ Lone Haase, ’Lijah, so it neither means nor matters;’ and the old man struck the drift path towards the moors.

Slowly he mounted the heights, breathing hard, and uttering ejaculatory prayers mixed with passages of Scripture that bore on devils and their power over the souls of men. His step was without trepidation, nor did his pulse beat the faster as he passed into the darkness.



There was a burdensome heat in the air, as from a distant furnace, that fevered his cheeks and choked his breathing : a superstitious man would have thought of the gates of hell. The horizon was tremulous with electric cloud ; luminous pale-blue vapours, phantom-like, played behind the far-off hills ; but there was no rain, and the stillness was unbroken. Not a leaf rustled its fellow leaf—not a blade of grass bent to touch the clustering blades that lay along the path the old man trod. It was as though Nature were frightened into a deep hush—a hush ominous of some unknown, yet impending doom.

Of all this Enos was forgetful. His mission took such hold of him that he saw only the forsaken soul of the tenant of the Lone House. Reaching the first bend of the path, he turned to traverse a length of disused road, still uneven with ruts long since cut by carts conveying stone from an old quarry. Several times he stumbled, but, repeating in suppressed voice the words of the Psalmist, 'He shall give His angels charge over thee, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone,' he pursued his

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way. Then he came to a shed—once the smithy of the quarry, now lone and ruined—a spot he knew well, and in which he had often drawn aside to pray ; a secret place where he had met God. Here he paused, in part for breath, in part for prayer.

For several minutes Enos remained kneeling on its damp floor, wrestling with the Almighty for the captive soul for which he was in search. It was a rude, illiterate prayer—no beauty in its phrase, little coherence in its petition :

‘Oh Thaa who con mak’ th’ devils believe an’ thremble, mak’ him as howd’s yon felley yonder leave howd o’ his precious soul ! Turn him aat, Lord, turn him aat ; and when Thaa’s gotten him aat, keep him aat. Put thi clog on him, Lord, an’ bruise his yed ! Thaa knows th’ poor chap is i’ th’ bonds o’ iniquity and th’ gall o’ bitterness. Deliver him, Lord, wi’ that mighty hand o’ Thine. Smite daan th’ Phil’s-tine o’ sin ! Break his bow and cut his spear asunder !’

As Enos finished, a low rumble of distant thunder came in at the door of the hut, as if in defiance of his cry.

'Thaa may growl, owd lad,' said the dauntless saint, 'but th' Almeety rules.'

The next stage of the journey lay along the shoulder of a bold hill, below which was a gorge called 'Th' Boggart Clough.' Gruesome and chill in sunniest days, on this, the night of Enos' mission, the yawning deep was as the Hades of the vision of old; but he skirted it with unfaltering step. By this time the rain was falling in big drops, spattering loudly on the herbage, and sudden gusts of wind disturbed the trees, and tossed the falling leaves in showers of wild confusion. Enos was now in the wilderness of the hills, and as the lurid light fell in frequency he saw the giant mounds rising in distance, their hollows low in gloom. From far-off farms feeble flames flickered, the dim illuminations of lone homes. To the fore lay the great shoulder of Cragcroft, the mighty monarch of that wild sweep, while half-way up its heights, and on the bend, stood the Lone House.

Enos reached its enclosure of garden before the full burst of the storm. Standing by the gate, which was unhinged and lying in the

path, he paused for breath, for the journey had been long. Then, offering another prayer, he went towards the door and knocked.

There was no answer ; but from the light that gleamed beneath the threshold Enos judged the stranger was within. Then he lifted the sneck, to find the door was barred ; and despite his lunges, it remained secure. Walking round the tangled garden to the entrance at the rear, the old man found the kitchen dimly illumined, and looking through the uncurtained window, beheld the man on whose salvation he was bent.

That which Enos saw and heard led him, for the first time, and for a moment only, to wish himself anywhere but on those heights on his errand of mercy. There stood the stranger, his hair falling over his shoulders, his hands clasped as if in prayer, with agonized entreaty pleading in every feature of his withered face. But when the old man heard the prayer that he put up—put up with such clearness of accent and finish of expression—he saw the ‘Divine Providence,’ as he called it, in his journey, and thanked the God who had brought him.

‘O God Almighty!’ cried the stranger,

‘wilt Thou not show mercy to Thy servant and the son of Thy handmaid? Hast Thou forgotten to be gracious? Why hast Thou cut me off in Thy sore displeasure?’ Then, stooping and straining his ear as though some voice spake to him from the ground, he started, and in tones of terror cried :

‘What! reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day?’ After this he raised his head, and, looking up, pleaded, ‘But I’ve always loved Thee, Lord, and served Thee.’ Then, bending his ear to the floor as though again listening, he said : ‘What! not to him that willeth, nor to him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy?’

Enos stooped low, keeping well under shadow of the wild growth of shrub that hung round the broken window of the kitchen, in part for secrecy, and in part for shelter from the now drenching showers of rain. Following the movements of the stranger, he noted a swift wheeling round of the heels and the sudden seizure of the thorn staff which was reared at his side. Then, in defiant tones, and with much beating the air, the voice continued :

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‘Get thee behind me ! get thee gone, seducer of the brethren, liar from the beginning, adversary of souls !’

At this point a flash of forked fire tore its way through the void and lit up the shadowy prison with a momentary flame.

‘There ! now thou see’st,’ continued the defiant voice. ‘“ I beheld Satan fall as lightning from heaven.” So said thy Master. So fall ! What ! sayest thou I shall fall with thee ?’ And he again listened as to a voice from below. ‘Fall with thee ?’ And the man fell, rolling over on the floor as he had done that morning in the clogger’s shop.

The storm was now at its height. In reckless course the flame tore its way across the gloom of cloud. The thunder no longer boomed, but cracked and rattled without distant note of warning, detonation following detonation, as though mad in the hurry of discharge, and eager to overtake in wild succession the receding claps of sound—the very hour of the power of darkness.

Rising from his paroxysm, the stranger laid hold of the fallen staff, and in fiercer and louder

tones, fragments of which Enos heard in the lull of the storm, cried :

‘I will smite thee! Keep thy breath of fire from off my garments; I will not carry thy fumes on me! Thou sayest I am thine? Never!’ And the thorn once more swept the air. ‘To be thine? Never—by God!’ And then came a volley of oaths and curses more fearful than the tempestuous voices of the night.

Then, for a little while the elements drew apart as though for respite, and in the lull the voice was again heard, not loud, nor defiant, but piteous and pleading :

‘If God has forgotten to be merciful,’ it cried, ‘is there not mercy with thee? I have asked Him’ (pointing with his hand above)—‘I have asked Him for help, and He showeth no pity towards His servant. Wilt not thou show pity towards me, and, in thy pity, leave me? Forsaken of God! Ah! that were bearable were I but forsaken of thee! Leave me alone! in pity, leave me alone!’

These words, uttered as to some unseen presence, and addressed to one with whom the speaker seemed to talk close at hand, smote

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the heart of Enos with a yearning pain, and led him at once to carry out his daring resolve. He had never before, in his long experience of the moods of the soul, heard a prayer offered to the archfiend for mercy. To him the act was that of mad despair. So, throwing up the rotten sash of the window of the room in which the tormented stood, he got through as nimbly as his aged limbs would allow him, and, stretching out his hands, cried :

‘ No more o’ that, maister, no more o’ that !  
“ Call upon Me i’ th’ day o’ trouble, an’ Aw will yer thee,” says the Almeety.’

‘ Brother, His ears are heavy. Yonder heavens are brass. Clouds and darkness are round about Him——’

‘ Here, howd thee on a bit !’ cried Enos. ‘ Durnd let th’ devil quote Scriptor to thee. He’s a gradely hand at it, aw con tell thi, but he awlus reads th’ wrang sense into ’t. Thaa knows he welly upset th’ Maister wi’ quotin’ it i’ th’ wilderness. But He gav’ it him back agen, and His texes (texts) were o’er nich for th’ owd sarpent. Naa come, gi’ him tex’ for tex’.’



The stranger stood looking at Enos as though he were the fiend incarnate. The lurid light gleaming in the horrible squint went into the depths of the old man's soul, and for a moment he quailed; but it was for a moment only, and as his faith rallied, his fear flew, and he continued:

'Naa come, tex' for tex'; not all o' one side, thaa knows.'

When the stranger took in the meaning of Enos he turned towards the corner of the room from which, as far as look and gesture conveyed a meaning, the fiend appeared to address his messages of woe. Stooping, as in the attitude of one who listened, his features distorted with a convulsive twitch, he suddenly sprang erect, and said:

'Hear ye the word: "Clouds without water, trees without fruit twice dead, plucked up by the roots; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness and darkness for ever."'

'Oh, he's gi'en thi that, has he? Tell him to go a bit further i' th' same 'pistle.'

Again the stranger bent his head to listen. Then, after remaining in this attitude for some moments, he looked up at Enos, and said:

‘He hath no reply.’

‘Aw thought as mich, th’ owd powse (a dirty person)! Then aw’ll say it for him. He tried to flay thee aat o’ th’ ’pistle o’ Jude, didn’t he? Well, thaa con tell him that Jude sez summat else—“Naa, unto Him that is able to keep us fro’ fallin’, an’ present us faultless afoore th’ presence o’ His glory.” Naa, then, ax him what he mak’s o’ that.’

A light broke upon the stranger’s face, and the fire that flashed in the horrible squint died away. Drawing near to Enos, and laying his hand upon the old man’s shoulder, he said :

‘Art thou an angel of light?’

‘Yi,’ replied he; ‘sent to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation.’

The darkness again fell on the haggard face, and, shaking his head, the stranger cried :

‘Then thou art not sent to me, for I am an heir of wrath. Listen!’ And, bending his ear towards the ground once more, he muttered, as though he were repeating what he heard, ‘It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and tasted of the good word of God, if they

shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance.'

'Oh, that's it, is it?' cried Enos. 'Well, thaa con tell him we're noan o'erfaced (daunted) yet. We've a bit o' scripiter as we con set agen that.' And he quoted the sixteenth verse of the third chapter of the Gospel of St. John. 'That 'ill tak' some beatin', maister ; an' it's noan what he sez, nor hoo sez, but what th' Lord said Hissel.'

'Help thou mine unbelief!' groaned the man.

'Naa thaa'rt comin' raand, aw con yer. If thaa con nobbud get a bit furder, an' say, "Increase my faith," thaa'll soon be maister o' th' devil. Aw'll mak' a prayer. There's naught like feightin' th' devil on yore knees. Th' odds are awlus agen him if yo' get on th' floor to wrestle wi' him.' And the two men knelt down on the damp flags, while Enos agonized for well-nigh half an hour on behalf of the stranger's soul.

It was an uncouth, weird prayer—loud, importunate—a jumble of texts and expressions current with the sect to which he belonged. There was much of the anthropomorphic in it,

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and what many would count the irreverent and coarse ; while the uncouth vernacular of the hills lent to the whole a grotesqueness and crudity that would have shocked the ears of the devout. But the old man had grip. He believed he was talking to someone, and to someone who could hear and grant what he asked for. Now he would lie prone ; then, lifting himself, he would throw back his shoulders and upturn his face, raising hands which trembled in the passion of his entreaty. Far on the midnight air the storm-winds tossed his cries, and who shall say they were not borne upward to where the child believes prayer is heard ?

When he ceased the storm had ceased too, and the moon, looking through the rent barriers of cloud, fell on the faces of the two men as they stood erect in the chill room of the Lone House.

Enos besought the stranger to accompany him home, but in vain. He said he must remain where he was ; and after many solicitations the old man wished him well, and descended the brow to his house in the vale,

where many awaited him with eager questionings.

‘It’s what aw tow’d yo’, lads—a case o’ possession. But we’ve maistered him. Aw never seed aught like it. He took some prayin’ aat o’ th’ hoile, an’ no mistake. It were a fair stan’-up feight. By Guy! but he con quote Scripter! Aw never yerd aught like it!’

‘Who doesto mean—th’ stranger?’

‘Nowe; aw mean th’ owd chap. He could give chapter and verse like a parson.’

‘Yi; they sen he’s a deal o’ larnin’.’

‘But he cannot pray,’ said Enos. ‘An’ what’s Scripter baat prayer?—like paader baat fire.’

On the following morning two men in uniform waited on the police at Heatherlow in search of a patient who in the previous week escaped from a retreat in the north of Yorkshire. They had, they said, traced him with difficulty to Dene, where they heard of his renting the Lone House on the moor, but on visiting that habitation, found it tenantless. The police, possessed of the village gossip, accompanied the keepers to the clogger’s shop,

and from there they sought out and interviewed Enos, who told them in few and simple words the story of the previous night, assuring them that when he left the stranger he was 'clothed and in his right mind.' Smiling at the good man's simplicity, they hastened on in their search; but whether they found their quest was never known in the district and village of Heatherlow.

Some days afterwards the sergeant of police told Elijah the brief story of the madman's career. A man of genius and many parts, he had been a popular preacher in the North of England, much given to a study of the occult, and dwelling often on the nature and personality of evil. Subject to epilepsy in his boyhood, and overstraining in after-years by much thought his unbalanced brain, the heat of a prolonged revival turned his mind, and he became subject to prolonged periods of delusion and depression, during which he supposed himself to be the child of evil, baptized by the powers of darkness into a life of sin. The psychological element in the story created but little interest in the rustic mind of Heatherlow. It was

enthralled rather by the elements of mystery and superstition ; and for many months Enos was looked upon with fear as an exorcist, and to his power in prayer was added his dominion over devils.





## OWD YEB'S NEMESIS.

- I. A MORNING'S QUEST.
- II. LIZA'S PRAYER.
- III. THE BUCKLED STRAP.



## I.

### A MORNING'S QUEST.

‘WHATEVER arto gettin’ up so soon for, Sis?’

‘To fotch thee a posy fro’ th’ clough.’

‘What! afoore thaa goes to thi wark?’

‘Yi, afoore aw go to mi wark.’

‘Thaa’s summat else agate beside th’ posy, lass; naa, hasn’t ta?’ And the sick girl raised herself in bed, and looked with inquiring eye into her sister’s face.

‘Aw durnd know as it’s aught to thee if aw hav’, Liza.’

‘Happen not, lass; but those roses o thine tell more tales nor thi tung.’

‘Aw tell thee aw’m baan to fotch thee a posy, an’ what more doesto want?’

‘Aw never said thaa wirnd; but thaa cornd

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look me i' th' face an' tell me it's nobbud th' posy 'at's fatched thee aat o' bed at this time o' th' mornin'.'

'Liza, thaa wor awlus one for sperrin' (asking questions). Get to sleep wi' thee; thaa needs it, aw'm sure.'

'Thaa sez "Get to sleep"; but who con sleep when thaa'rt marlockin' wi' Jonathan i' th' clough, an' mi faither swearin' he'll be th' deeth o' yo' both?'

'Threatened folk live long, lass.' And so saying, the girl combed out her long hair before a rickety looking-glass that refused to retain the angle of vision.

'Aw fair tremble for thee, Sis. Thaa knows th' owd mon 'ill noan be set. Sithee! doesto remember that?' And the girl bared her arm, and showed a scar, whiter than the white flesh, where years before the buckle of her father's belt had fallen in one of his inhuman chastisements.

'Durnd show me, Liza; it raises th' dule (devil) i' me, and makes me feel as aw durnd care if he does his worst.'

'Do as aw tell thee, lass, an' stop awhom whol

thaa goes to thi work. Folk never know whose een are on 'em ; an' if he finds thee aat, he'll leave his mark on thee an' o', see if he doesn'd. Aw'd rayther he licked me nor thee, ony time, Sis, bad as aw am. Thaa'rt too bonny to be licked, thaa knows ;' and drawing her half-dressed sister towards her, she breathed her love in long caresses.

'Durnd fret, Liza ; aw'm baan to hav' Jonathan or noan. Aw'm noan partic'lar abaat my skin, noather. A lass is noan worth mich as cornd stan' a lickin' for th' felley hoo loves.'

'He tow'd mi mother t'other neet as he'd swing for thee afore thaa should wed Jonathan,' said the frightened girl.

'Well, if he's no more wit, aw cornd help it.'

'But thaa's no need to stan' i' th' owd chap's gate, thaa knows, Sis.'

'Then he should get aat o' mine, that's o' ;' and the girl slipped on her blouse, and stood once more, defiant in her wrath, before the obdurate glass.

'Aw've tow'd thee, Sis : he sez as he'll kill thee afoore yo' shall get wed.'

'Then he'd better start o' th' job, and go

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thro' wi' it. Aw'se find him some wark afore he's finished.'

'Durnd talk i' that feshion ; it fair mak's me ill. Aw tell thee, aw couldn't bide to see thee licked.'

'Aw'se hav' to tak' mi chance, lass, like o' th' rest o' folk i' this world.'

They were sisters, children of old Yeb. The elder, Eliza, was an invalid, nervous and timid, with a spirit long since crushed by a father's overbearing rule. Sis, the younger, was strong, adventurous, and self-willed, defiant of the tamer's hand, and so 'taking' as at times to disarm it.

Old Yeb cared only that his children should be strong enough to work for him. Week by week he pocketed their earnings to spend at the Sheaf and Sickle, the rendezvous of his indulgences. His great grievance was the elder girl's affliction ; and so incensed was he at the loss of wage, that he never wearied of charging her with 'gammin',' or declaring that 'hoo wor nobbud plagued wi' th' tireds.' More than once he had driven her to the factory by force,

when she had fainted in her weakness and been sent home.

He also used to swear that 'none of his lasses should wed afoore he died,' arguing that duty to parents preceded duty to husbands. This was the ground of the younger one's offence. She was 'keeping company,' as the villagers called it, with Jonathan Fenton, the son of a man whom Yeb hated with all the fierceness of his malignant mind. With fearful imprecations he vowed vengeance on the match, but all to little purpose, for his younger daughter was as defiant as her father was threatening. For the sake of mother and sick sister, the girl ceased to walk openly with the youth ; but surreptitiously the courtship was carried on—the fiercer for its part suppression.

It was the fear of her father's vindictiveness and her strong attachment towards her sister that created in the mind of Eliza a foreboding of ill. Had she thought less of Sis, the strain would not have been so terrible. The girl was, however, her pet and plaything ; and for many a year her life had been in part sacrificed on her behalf. She saw the inevitable, and shrank

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from it. Never before was old Yeb's will defied. Punishments were common in the home—but these were for petty offences—and displays of brutal temper and unbridled wrath on the part of the old man. Now, however, he was flatly disobeyed, and that by a girl not eighteen years of age. So far he had held his hand in abeyance. She was his favourite child, and possessed of charms that disarmed him. But he only waited his time ; a day would come—an evil day—when with the coward strength of exasperation the blow would fall, and that with fearful consequence. Eliza knew this, and it made her tremble.

Suspecting the early ramble of Sis to be after Jonathan rather than after the flowers, Eliza was troubled and anxious, and turning for the last time towards her sister, said :

‘Naa tak’ care o’ thisel’, Sis. Durnd get him into his tantrums ; it’ll be th’ deeth o’ me if thaa does. Aw couldn’t bide to see thee licked as he used to lick me.’

‘Durnd thee bother thi yed abaat me, lass. Aw’m baan to hav’ Jonathan choose haa ;’ and with a kindly look of farewell in her defiant eye,



she stole down the stairway in her stockings, then, putting on her clogs in the kitchen below, she let herself out into the village street, where all lay quiet in the hush of dawn.

It was sunrise, and the tints of morning were glowing beyond the distant hills. Gentle airs, infected with the scent of heather, and burdened with the music of the moorlands, stole down from the heights, cooled by their night wanderings over miles of herbage, and by the rush-fringed banks of peaty pools. Little flowers were but half awake, lazily opening their petalled lids to the gentle summons of the day, and on each slender blade of grass there sat a jewelled crown of dew. The dark-olive hues of early hours still shadowed the foliage, and the trees wore the gloom that lingers on the skirts of dawn. Along the road wreaths of dust lazily chased each other, pausing to whirl in playful spirals, then thinning into cloudlets, to fall on leaf and flower like showers of summer snow. It was the matin hour of Nature, when every breath is worth the breathing, and every revelation tells of new-born day.

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As the girl stepped out of the cottage door, her features caught the sunrise, and flamed transfigured in the morning glow. There was within her, too, that other flame—the flame of love—and her awakening passions greeted the awakening day. Tall and lithely built, she walked with the erectness of a queen. The features were too strong to be beautiful, and her defiant eye took from the winsomeness that is woman's charm. A heavy fringe hid the forehead, and rich masses of black hair crowned a proudly-poised head, that rose from a flesh column of neck such as Rossetti loved. The face, however, was arrestive in its charm, but lacked colour, close hours of factory toil having long since washed out the rose.

Over the girl's head and shoulders a shawl of pretentious check was thrown, under which glowed a loosely-fitting, scarlet blouse, gathered round the waist with a leathern belt, her skirt being of closely-wrapping linsey, and not long enough to hide her ankles, hosed in home-knit stockings, and shod with 'wooden shoon.'

She was the better type of the hard-headed, common-sense Lancashire lass. Her father

claimed her wage, it is true ; but that was all. She was her own mistress, and knew it, and remained strong in her own self-rule. Devoid somewhat of sentiment, she was free from the gloss that makes unreal the lives of those who move in other circles. Her speech was broad, her manners easy ; but her heart was sound, and her spirit unbroken. Since she had loved Jonathan the heroic in her nature was roused, and she was all the more womanly and true for her father's brutal 'nay' ; indeed, his opposition but fed the flame of her devotion, and, as she said to her sister, 'It wor either to be Jonathan or noan.'

The girl crossed the road and walked towards the uplands, carolling a ditty, of late the musical outlet for many a passion in that little seat of life—boys whistling it at their play, men striking up an occasional bar in the more thoughtful moods of their toil, and women and girls setting their daydreams and fancies to its simple air. She knew little of what she sang, and cared less ; for hers was the unconscious fulness of the new life of love. Her horizon was luminous with

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one presence, towards which she moved, and towards which she was drawn.

Climbing a shoulder of the hill, and rounding another ridge of the valley, she overlooked the Great Clough, a ravine silent and lonesome, torn out of the heart of the moors. Here she stood, shading her eyes from the sun, now above the hills, eagerly scanning the distance for her quest. But there was no human form within sight. Cattle dotted the low-lying meadows, and flocks of sheep grazed along the heights; a dog was frolicking within the precincts of a distant farm, and a horse browsed quietly in a field not far from where she stood. But it was not for objects such as these her eyes were restless and her heart throbbed.

‘Aw wonder what’s gotten him?’ said the girl half aloud, as she scanned the hills. ‘Aw could ha’ liked him to ha’ bin here th’ fust. It looks a bit o’erbold to be waitin’ for him i’ this fashion—it does, forshure.’

Then she blushed, and ran down the steep side of the clough towards the trough below, where flowed in sinuous trend the waters from the hills, pausing in her descent to rest against

the trees, whose fibrous roots knit together the crumbling banks, and between which ran stretches of bracken covered with hazy vapour, and dreamy vistas of wild hyacinths dim beneath the moist breathings of the morn. More than once she slipped and fell against the gnarled trunks; but she was a hardy lass, and soon gained the trough, little worse for her stumbling descent.

Here again she found herself alone—alone under dappling shadows, and by the side of the winding stream glinting under stray shafts of light that fell slantwise between the parting leaves.

Turning towards the outlet of the clough, she scanned the opening vista, to see nothing but the bending boughs, and sweep of early birds.

‘Aw wonder what’s gotten him?’ she once more said. ‘Aw never knew him lat’ afoore. Happen aw’m too soon! It doesn’d look daycent. An’ yet, aw couldn’t like to be too lat’. Ey, dear! luv’s a maister, an’ no mistake. An’ yet aw’m noan baan to show aw’m keen. Aw fair wonder what he sees i’ me, bless his bonny

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een. Aw couldn'd like to loise him. But it's noan reight i' young lasses to be forrard—nor i' owd uns, for th' matter o' that! Ey, Jonathan lad, arto baan to be long?'

Suddenly her eye rested on a cluster of golden-rod growing on a narrow ledge near the top of the rocky head of the clough—tall, slender stems they were, with spirals of bright yellow bending in the breeze. Now, golden-rod was her sister's favourite wilding, and remembering this, she remembered also her promise, made but an hour ago, to gather a posy for that sick girl's bedside. The flowers, however, grew beyond her reach. Even a trained climber would have debated the wisdom of their quest. This determined her—the risk becoming the relish; and laying hold of the bushes that hung a tangled ladder over the rocky surface, she commenced her ascent.

It was a picture—that of the climbing girl framed in the greenery of the gorge. Her shawl had fallen, and her supple limbs showed their full proportions beneath the now uncovered dress. Her arms, bare and shapely, swelled under the strain of their muscles, and

the rhythmic movement of her shoulders was a poem in flesh. And then the long hair fell loose in its dark masses over the red blouse, now displaced by the rapid movements of the climber ; and, as she came level with the ledge on which the flowers waved, a cruel thorn drew a scarlet line across the now flushed face. Nor was the picture lost. He for whom she waited was a watcher, pulsing with admiration and fear.

On reaching the ledge, she seated herself to rearrange her hair and dress, her bosom all the while beating turbulently, and her face flaming with the climb. There she sat, in one of those nooks of vegetation found only in the heart of the hills—a nook screened by overhanging hazel and briar, where birds nest and bees murmur, and insects light without fear of chase—there she sat, a captive queen amid her flowers.

Stretching out her hand, she drew down the slender stems on which the golden spirals grew, and for the possession of which she had risked so much, setting off their yellow bloom with ferns and crag grass, and humming a gleeful air that told of mirthful mood.

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The shrill sound of a whistle broke the silence of the clough, ringing continuous echoes along its fastnesses, and startling the birds. It startled the girl also, for it was the factory's summons to daily toil, announcing the moments of her freedom as numbered.

Preparing to descend, she saw, for the first time, the recklessness of the climb. The perpendicular rock before her forbade return; and, looking up, she discovered the level of the moors just beyond her reach. Sis was a prisoner in mid-air, with no foothold save a narrow ledge of vegetation.

Seeing her only chance was upward, she looked round for loose stones with which to raise herself to reach the overhanging ground above; but nothing lay at her feet but a tangle of thorns and grass. Then a reckless spirit seized her, and she resolved to risk the descent; but better judgment ruled, and she lay back, the creature of her self-control.

Many a time at her looms, as the sun beat through the top-lights of the shed, Sis fretted for the freedom of the hills, little thinking they held a captivity as well as labour. Now, how-



ever, that she was their prisoner, she was all too eager to exchange their silences for the din and closeness of the factory in the vale below.

As she sat, wondering as to her deliverance, the ludicrousness of the position struck her, and she began to laugh. This, however, was quickly followed by vexation, and she bit her lips to keep back her tears. It was not fear that fretted her; to that passion she was a stranger. But to sit helplessly on that lofty ledge, with time flying, the relentless whistle screaming, her looms waiting, and all because of her foolhardiness, to say the least, stung her to the quick.

Should she cry for help? But who would hear? Likely enough the men at the neighbouring delph; and they—they would mock and take advantage of her helplessness, and wound her modesty with their indecent chaff. No; she would remain where she was sooner than be lifted by hands such as theirs.

The minutes passed, and time became imperative. Again the summoning whistle sounded in the vale—a summons she knew it was dire punishment to disobey. Those greedy looms, all devouring of weft and woman's labour—they

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were waiting, waiting for her to start their wheels and feed their shuttles and perfect their half-woven pieces for the wrangling buyers at the city mart. Against their claims she could not stand. She must cry out, even as that importunate whistle was crying—cry out to rouse some ear and gain some help.

In the moment of her despair she heard a voice—well known and as dearly loved—the voice of Jonathan, who, beside himself with rapture, stood gazing at his imprisoned queen.

‘Sis, cornd ta get daan?’

It was enough—he was there and she was safe.

His first movement was to spring towards the network ladder up which Sis climbed, but the quick-witted girl waved him back, and said :

‘Durnd thee come up here an o’, or there’ll be two on us.’

That was just what Jonathan wanted—two of them. Yes ; but the twain were one. Sis and himself could sit for ever on that ledge of rock. Was it not large enough for their home, and snug enough for their whispers?—a lovers’ paradise, where the story of the former Eden

should be retold? And as Jonathan ravished his eyes on the captive girl, all the grander for her flush of adventure, as well as all the more bewitching for her prison-house of rock, he again made as though he would climb to where she stood.

‘Thaa mornd come up here, aw tell thee. One foo’s enough. Get to th’ top o’ th’ clough, then thaa con poo’ (pull) me up, happen.’

Although Jonathan was delirious with the love passion, his level-headedness led him to see the sanity of the girl’s command, so, climbing the ravine where the bank was less steep, he made his way to the overhanging ledge under which the girl stood, and, looking down, saw her in readiness.

He threw himself flat on the ground that he might the farther reach over to where she stood on tiptoe with outstretched arm. Then, laying hold of her wrists, he felt the plunging throb of her pulses, and they beat a current of fire through his soul. Their faces met, his bent over, hers upturned, the breath of the girl coming in quick spasms of suspense, her great

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eyes open trustfully — eyes in whose deeps Jonathan was fast being drowned.

Fortunately Sis retained her self-possession, and suddenly brought Jonathan to his by words almost cruel in their commonplace.

‘Naa then, Jonathan, durnd be gawmless. Thaa con mak’ as mich love as thaa loikes when thaa gets me aat o’ this hoile, but tha mun get me aat first.’

Despite his strength, the task was overpowering; his purchase was failing him; he felt he could not draw her by her wrists to the top.

‘Leave go mi right hand, Sis.’

Without a falter the girl obeyed, and swung off over the ravine, held by the single arm of her lover.

Then he bent still further over, and, with one desperate lunge, slipped his freed arm under hers, and, grasping her with an embrace in which fear and love together lent their strength, with one mighty lift he brought her kneeling to his side.

For a few moments neither spoke. Then Jonathan took the girl’s hands once more in

his own, but this time gently and tenderly, to find her wrists ringed and wealed from the terrible grip in which he had held them. Raising them to his lips, he kissed them, saying :

‘Ey! aw’ve hurt thee, lass.’

‘Ne’er heed, they’re nobbud mi wrists, an’ they con stan’ it. It’s *him* wee’n gotten to heed.’

And, looking round, Jonathan saw Reuben, the village fool, watching from behind a tree overlooking the clough where the morning’s adventure had happened. Then he knew, as the girl knew also, that in another hour the whole country-side would be ringing with the news

## II.

### LIZA'S PRAYER.

A WAVE of excitement swept the village as Daft Reuben's story travelled by currents more subtle and swift than those following the wires that stretched along the roadway and crossed the moors. The fool outran the lovers, and reached the factory gates breathless, colouring his story with the imagination of lunacy. As Jonathan and Sis walked down the alley to their looms, the whole shed was agog, and two hundred pairs of eyes were raised from the flying shuttles and transferred to the youth and maiden, who, all too conscious, confusedly settled to their work. By means of signs and lip movements, a silent interchange of criticism and wonderment passed from weaver to weaver, and in less time

than it would take to narrate, the whole of those toilers knew one another's minds.

All through the morning knots of neighbours stood at angles of the pavement, or discussed the news at one another's garden gates. Jonathan and Sis were that day the unconscious cause of many a spoiled dinner, and not a few recriminations between man and wife.

Old Iron-ears held the floor of the clogger's shop. It was astounding the news that man gathered; indeed, his deafness seemed to aid him in the information he gleaned. He was doing his best to impress those standing round the counter that there would be murder, 'or summat like it,' at Yeb's house that night, the old man being wild with the story told to him by the daft spy, and vowing that he'd end it 'afoore th' moon wor up.'

'He's at th' Sheaf and Sickle naa, primin' hissel' wi' owd tenpenny. Let him get a gallon or two o' that into him, an' it 'll be beltinker, aw con tell yo',' said Iron-ears.

'It's come to summat when a felley cornd tackle his childer baat gettin' drunk o'er it,' replied Elijah,

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‘Yon young’st’s a maister, aw con tell yo’; th’ owd hap’s awlus bin flay’d on her ever sin hoo were a little un, interjected Tic-tak, who had just come in with a clock under his arm, which he deposited on the counter as he settled down for his afternoon’s chat.

‘An’ hoo needs to be an’ o’, to live wi’ yon powse.’ It was Asenath who spoke. ‘Aw fair shame for ’Lijah here havin’ him so mich i’ th’ shop. Owd idle-bones! Aw’d mak’ him fend for hissell’ if he wor mine, or he’d ha to clam (go without food).’

‘What arto talkin’ abaat, ’Senath?’ asked Iron-ears.

‘Abaat him as thaa’rt talkin’ abaat. Who didto think, hey?’

‘Well, aw tell yo’, he’ll welly kill yon lass to-neet, mind if he doesn’d.’

‘What’s the lass done amiss? Hoo nobbud wants to ged wed. And why shouldn’t hoo?’

Iron-ears confessed there was no reason why she should not, or, as he put it, he ‘didn’t know o’ ony lawful impediment.’

‘Aw con tell thee what th’ impediment is—it’s brass. Th’ owd good-for-naught willn’d let



ony o' th' lasses wed becose he'd loise their wage.  
That's th' top an' bottom on 't.'

'Yi, an' th' middle an' o',' assented Iron-ears,  
whose organ of sound for once seemed open.

'Th' truest words thaa ever spoke, lad,' said  
Tic-tak, seating himself beside his clock.

'Does he think as lasses 'as naught to do but  
work for felleys wi' bones i' their backs?' cried  
Asenath, now fairly warmed, and glowing with  
her theme. 'What's a lass for but to get  
wed, an' hav' childer, and a home o' her own,  
ey?'

'Aw durnd see why a lass shouldn't wark,  
'Senath. Hoo addles (earns) more at th' factory  
nor awhom, thaa knows.'

'Yi; an' thaa knows that an' o', Tic-tak.  
If thaa hadn't wed a four-loom weyver it would  
ha' bin a poor luk-aat for thee. A deal o' good  
thi clock-mendin' does thee, though aw know it  
mak's thee a gentleman i' thi own een.'

'Th' lass, thaa knows, 'Senath, is nobbud  
young.'

'A deal o' room thaa has to talk, 'Lijah,  
when thaa knows thaa wed me afore aw wor  
eighteen year owd.'

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'Happen thaa wed him, 'Senath,' timidly suggested Tic-tak.

'Happen what?'

But Tic-tak was silent.

'Thaa'd better keep thi tung i' thi yed, lad, for thaa's noan so mich in it, and what there is is better kept to thisel'. Aw tell yo', yon lass o' owd Yeb's has a reight to wed Jonathan if hoo's a mind.'

'But thaa knows what owd Lolly used to say, 'Senath?'

'Aw know he said a lot o' foolish things i' his time.'

'Well, aw'll tell thee. He used to say: "Ne'er start courtin' afoore yo're eighty; an' ne'er ged wed afoore yo're eighty-two."'

'An' haa wor th' owd felley baan to keep th' world agate?' asked Asenath.

'Aw never ax'd him,' said Iron-ears.

'Well, aw wed when aw wor a lass, an' aw never sobbed o'er it yet. An' aw've had mi ups an' daans an' o'; but two agen one ony day, if they'll nobbud pool together like.'

'An' if they willn'd, what then, 'Senath?'

'What then, sesto? Then th' woman mun pool th' mon along wi' her, that's all.'

'An' if he willn'd go?' queried Tic-tak.

'Then make him; as thi' wife should ha' made thee long sin.'

'Aw'll tell yo' what,' said Iron-ears, 'there'll be a bonny row up at yon hoile (house) to-neet.'

'What hoile? Yeb's, doesto mean?'

'Yi. Yon lass breeds of her faither. There'll be two on 'em, an' no mistake.'

'Well, aw'll back th' lass,' joined in Asenath. 'Hoo's gam', ony road; an' when a woman's gam', hoo tak's some lickin'.'

'An' owd Yeb 'll tak' some lickin' an' o', moralized Iron-ears. 'He sez he's never bin licked yet.'

'That doesn'd say as he never will be; an' when he is, it'll be wi' a woman—see if it willn'd,' cried Asenath.

'Thaa knows he welly killed their Liza o'er loisin' her wage; an' hoo's never like looked up sin.'

'Yi; but yon's woven wi' different caants (number of yarns).'

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‘Thaa’rt reight, ’Senath ; hoo’s a cock ’at ’ll feight.’

‘Well, aw’ve three wed, an’ aw let ’em pleas theirsels ; an’ aw durnd know they’re ony th’ worse for’t. If yo’ set yo’rsel’s agen young folk keepin’ company, yo’ nobbud set ’em th’ harder agate. Let ’em alone, an’ they’ll mate reight i’ th’ long-run. Bother wi’ ’em, an’ they’ll go agen yo’. If Yeb had wanted to keep yon two fro’ one another, he should ha’ let ’em go their own gate.’

‘Yi. Young folk go by contraries ; an’ there’s some mak’ ’ats best when they’re let alone.’

‘Jonathan’s a very daycent lad, isn’t he?’ asked Iron-ears.

‘Aw never yerd a word agen him. He teyches at Sunday-schoo’, an’ latly he’s tan to preychin’.’

‘That’s one thing as Yeb has agen him. He sez he wants no parsons i’ his haase,’ said Tic-tak. ‘He co’s ’em foomerts.’

‘He’s gotten’ a terrible twist in his inside, somehaa,’ Elijah interjected.

‘Aw durnd think he’s gotten a inside at

all,' replied his sharp wife. 'If he had, he'd be a bit more considerate o' others, that he would.'

'He's gotten a inside for drink, an' no mistake. Aw'll bet he's sossin' naa (lapping with the tongue, as a dog),' said Iron-ears. 'But aw tell yo'—aw'm some sorry abaat yon lass. He'll peyle (beat to bruise) her to-neet, see if he doesn'd.'

'Aw welly think, 'Lijah, aw'll go up to th' haase misel', and see what th' owd felley 'll be up to.'

'Thee stop awhom, lass; hoo's noan thine, thaa knows. Happen he'll turn on thee an' o'.'

'Then he'll be th' first mon as ever did; an' aw con tell thee, he'll noan do it twice.'

'He'll noan meddle wi' thee, 'Senath. He's fear'd on thee; aw yerd him say so,' said Tic-tak.

'Aw care noan whether he's fear'd or no. Aw'm baan up to th' haase, choose-haa.'

All through the day Sis had been working with a vivid consciousness of the coming strife; Jonathan, too, dimly realized it, and during the dinner-hour did his best to persuade the girl to go home to his mother's, and seek safety there.

This she refused to do, knowing that her father would follow, and bring disgrace on the cottage of the honest woman whose son she so dearly loved. Then Jonathan declared he would go home with Sis, and fight it out with her father; but this the girl flatly forbade. So it came that the two parted at the factory gate, and Sis walked home alone.

As she climbed the long brow many eyes were upon her, and many pitied her. Her father was known for his ungovernable temper, and the cruel punishments from time to time inflicted on his children. The girl was a favourite with all, and there was not a cottager but would have offered her shelter. This they dared not do, however, for all stood in terror of old Yeb. In the whole village there were but two who dared beard him, and they were women—the one Elijah's wife, the other his love-rebellious child. The latter knew she was no match against him in strength. Before him she was frail as the reed in the wind; but she knew no fear, and she possessed a will. There was a dim consciousness in her mind that will was mightier than brute force. All within her told

her that whatever punishment he might mete out towards her, her will would conquer. She was granite to bear and omnipotent to do, and in this lay her strength. She might come out of the battle maimed, but if she did, it would be as conqueror; and if she didn't come out of it, still her father would not have had his own way. That very morning she had said to her sister, 'Jonathan or noan'; that was enough—it was ratified by a will as strong as the will of a king.

She reached home to find her father absent. What a home—her mother weeping, and her sister cowed, and waiting the coming storm! Upstairs lay the sick girl, trembling in terror, and bathed in the cold sweat of fear. The only one in the house who coolly awaited the crisis was Sis herself.

A basin of tea stood on the table and a plate of buttered muffins, which she pushed aside.

'Eyt a bit o' summat, lass,' pleaded her mother; 'thaa'll happen need it afoore th' neet's aat.'

'Happen aw shall,' said the girl; and sitting down, she took the food prepared—the only one

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in the house who that night found an appetite. Putting aside the empty plate, she turned to her mother, and said : ' Aw shornd sleep wi' Liza to-neet ; I'll go i' th' garret.'

The mother knew full well the reason of this resolve—it was consideration for her sick sister's feelings. If she was to be thrashed, she would be thrashed when no eye but her father's was on her.

In another moment she climbed the stair, but in passing through the room of the invalid to the one above she was stayed by her voice.

' Where arto baan, Sis?'

' I' th' garret,' she said.

' What arto baan i' th' garret for?'

' Thaa knows. Aw'd rayther meet mi faither by hissel'.'

Then, going to the side of the sick girl's bed, she kissed her.

' Aw'll pray for thee, Sis.'

A hollow laugh came from the drawn lips of the younger girl ; and then, turning towards the bed, she said :

' Pray for thisel', lass, an' for mi mother.

' Durnd be so hard, Sis. Come here ;' and



as she stooped down, the weak and bedridden girl threw her arms round the rebellious one and wept.

'My arm 'll be like thine to-morn, happen,' said the younger girl.

'What doesto mean?'

'Didn'to show me afoore aw went aat this mornin' th' scar mi faither left on thi when thaa lost thi wage? Aw've noan forgotten it, if thaa has. Thaa tried to fretten me wi' it, but thaa didn't. An' see, aw fotched thee a posy after all;' and taking a crushed and faded bunch of golden rod from her bosom, she thrust it into the sick girl's released hand.

For a moment the two girls were silent; then Sis said :

'Let's look at that scar agen';' and turning back the sleeve of her sister's nightdress, she saw the white mark, whiter than the white flesh—a mark about an inch in length, and glossy with the new skin that had formed over it.

Looking at it, she kissed it—kissed the scar—and then, turning hastily away, she said :

'Aw con stan' it if thaa did; aw'm stronger nor thee.'

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The long summer's day drew to a close. Silently the curtains of night were drawn, and darkness mingled almost imperceptibly with the light. The stars began to glimmer in the deepening blue, and cool airs fell like a balm on the fevered world. As Sis lay awake on the truckle-bed, the clothes thrown off her because of the heat, she looked through the skylight over her head at the distance and the glory that was seen through that square foot of glass. Occasionally a sound reached her from the village ; then she heard a footfall, and wondered if it was that of the father whose presence she awaited. She heard a girl singing the very song she herself had sung that morning as she wandered out into the clough to meet Jonathan. Then silence fell—the silence of the night.

Still he came not—the one for whom she waited came not. What a difference between the morning's waiting and that dread waiting of the night! Within a few hours she had waited for two fates—the fate of love and the fate of cruel hate. Two great relationships were in conflict ; husband and father stood side

by side with their twin claims, and she was on the side of him whose she had vowed to be. Not that her thoughts were so worded, yet such were the dim musings flitting like dark birds over the gloomy sky of her untutored mind.

Still the silence and the horrible suspense! Hush! there was a voice, a gentle voice, broken with occasional sobs, and it came from the chamber below. As she strained her ear she heard it was a prayer—a prayer from the lips of her sick sister. Liza was true to her word: she was praying for her.

Lifting herself from the tumbled bed, she stole to the stair-head that came up from her sister's room, and, listening, she caught the words:

'Soften mi faither's heart, Lord, an' durnd let him lick Sis. Thaa knows hoo means reight, Lord, though hoo will hav' her own road. Hoo's done naught wrong, Lord. Hoo nobbud wants to wed Jonathan; and he's a daycent felley, Lord—he's turned preycher an' o'. Save both on 'em, an' let 'em wed one another; and durnd let mi faither beat her, Lord, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.'

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The prayer was choked in its utterance, and put up in simplicity and faith; but was it answered?

As the prayer fell on the ears of Sis, she crept back to bed and slept. In so much the prayer *was* answered, for it brought a great peace into the young girl's soul. The little attic, like many another, was glorified by that subtle presence which saints and sufferers in all ages declare follows prayer. What the awakening might be she cared not, for there came with the prayer the line of an old Hebrew hymn: 'When I awake I am still with Thee.'

### III.

#### THE BUCKLED STRAP.

No sooner did old Yeb hear the news from Daft Reuben than he drew himself apart for thought. He was a slow man, and it took a long time for facts in their full significance to reach his understanding. The schoolmaster used to say he was one of those into whom truth percolated. One thing was certain: in him was no quick perception. The intuitive was lacking. All that reached him reached him from without, and even then slowly, and in driblets. That which he most quickly saw was in his own interests. In the language of men, his eye was on the main chance, and this with him was in making his children work for and keep him in indolence and occasional riot. Firmness with Yeb was stupidity, and what

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he called his convictions and ideas were nothing but the prejudice of crass ignorance. He was a sensual man, too, and, like all sensual men, cruel—that is, where he dared to be; for at heart he was a craven. In his working days in the factory he was the terror of the girls and children, and now that time hung on his hands, he was the terror of his home.

Being a man of slow comprehension, it was some little time before the length and breadth of his daughter's offending, as told by Daft Reuben, dawned on him—or, as the school-master said, 'percolated through his understanding.' Little by little, however, he gathered certain fragments, which when put together patterned a picture wherein he saw a self-willed daughter hanging in the arms of a youth with whom he had forbidden her to speak. He saw, also, four looms standing, and himself deprived of so much income, in the absence of the girl from her morning's work. This, in his eyes and moral judgment, was the climax of the sin. Bad enough, indeed, to be disobeyed; worse far to be robbed—robbery with him being a fraction less per week of his daughter's earnings.

Thus the morning's incident shaped itself, assuming proportions of gross exaggeration, and leading to resolves equally as foolish and cruel as the picture was disproportioned.

The innate dulness of Yeb was also seen in his failure to measure the character of the defiant girl. Why was she not frightened at him? Yes; and why was he frightened at her?—this last being by far the more perplexing question of the two. His other daughters turned pale when they heard his footfall, and his wife sat cowed and silent in his presence. And yet this girl, this youngest born, was his equal, nor feared to show it. He groped round his dark and dishevelled mind for a reason, but in vain. At last, in despair, he said: 'Happen it's 'cose hoo tak's after me.' He was, however, only right in part. Sis possessed her father's will, and there the likeness ended. The spirit which in her father was brutalized, in her was toned and saturated with a nobleness and sanity drawn from the now broken-hearted woman whom she knew and loved as mother. Yeb would give way to nobody and for nothing if self were at stake; while his youngest child was ever giving

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way, but it was for right and love. Once determined, however, and that for the right, her fingers might have been burned to their stumps before she would have yielded. And this Yeb knew : he was helpless.

But his authority had been set at naught, and a portion of his weekly income was threatened ; for if the girl married Jonathan four and twenty shillings a week would pass from Yeb's pocket to that of another. No ; it must not be ; as he said, ' he mut as weel bury th' lass,' such being his estimate of the relationships of life. He would stop it somehow. But how ? He was powerless to touch Jonathan, and if he touched the girl he knew his chastisement would be of little use. But why should she not have a taste of his belt as well as her sisters—that long, lithe, leathery belt, which he used to unbuckle from his waist and curl with cruel strokes round their naked flesh, many a time drawing blood, and more than once sorely bruising with its steel buckle—why not give Sis a taste of that ? But the more he pondered in his sluggish mind, the more he feared to carry out his purpose. He was a coward in the presence of the girl.



At last he cudgelled his brains into the activity that engendered an idea—a bright idea. ‘Old tenpenny’ was a rare fortifier of the nerves. With a gallon of that liquor in him he might be able to face up before Sis and give her a taste of the strap, and of its cruel buckle too; for Yeb relished most the strokes he dealt with the end that was edged with steel. Yes; he was prepared to swear by ‘old tenpenny.’ It had often nerved him to thrash his wife; and more than once he had held his own at a stand-up fight, his muscles strung by its elixir. ‘Drink wine—think wine,’ so someone has said. In more homely phrase Yeb was saying, though unconsciously: ‘Drink ale—feight ale.’ So it came to pass he found his way about noon to the Sheaf and Sickle, and settled down to recruit himself for the coming conflict with the helpless girl.

By the time he reached the inn his plans were perfected. He would get ‘sharp fresh’ (slightly intoxicated)—just bouncy enough for the job he had in hand; then, on the girl’s return from the factory, turn towards his home, and show her by arguments of leather and steel that only one

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master ruled, that master being none other than himself. It had taken some hours of careful planning. It was worth it, however ; and now he saw and grasped, and felt equal to it all.

There was that afternoon at the Sheaf and Sickle what the landlord called 'a roaring trade ;' for as soon as it was noised abroad that 'owd Yeb wor suppin' ale to get his hand in for th' lass's lickin', not a few of the looser end of the village joined him.

There he sat, stolid and silent, in the nook by the chimney jamb, a pint pot of the tenpenny before him, sipping like a connoisseur, and allowing the rich aroma of the liquor to linger on his palate, smacking his lips with a gusto known only to those trained in taste for ale. He would not even spoil the flavour by indulgence in tobacco, his pipe lying at his side, and in use only between his supplies.

'So thaa'rt baan to hav' a local preycher for thi son-i'-law, aw yer?' It was a rough, greasy man who spoke—Ned o' Sam's.

'Well, yo' con do wi' a bit o' grace up at your haase. Leastways, thaa con, cornd ta, Yeb?' The speaker was a tackler from the

neighbouring factory who was known as Sim o' Tom's o' th' Tops.

'Thaa'll be shappin' religious thisel naa, willn't ta, Yeb? It 'll be summat like to sithi a Methody,' said Billy-baat-cap (the man seldom wore head-gear).

'Hasto gotten thi black coat yet for Sundos?'

'Yi, thi prayin' coat, thaa knows, Yeb,' rasped in Ned o' Sam's.

The old man sat imperturbable, sipping his ale, and allowing the chaff to pass unheeded.

'Wor thi lass an' Jonathan doin' a bit o' prayin' i' th' clough this mornin', thinksto, Yeb?'

'Thaa'd better ax 'em,' said Yeb, allowing himself to be drawn.

'Nay, it's noan o' mi business,' replied Billy-baat-cap.

'Then thaa'd better mind what is thi bisness, that's all ;' and the old man dipped his face into the pint pot that stood on the table before him.

'Some folk's terrible independent when they ged up a bit i' th' world, arn'd they, Billy?' asked Sim o' Tom's o' th' Tops.

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‘What do yo’ call gettin’ up i’ th’ world?’ said Ned. ‘Lettin’ yore lasses work for yo’?’

‘Yi; an’ then lickin’ ’em wi’ a strap if they loise threaha’pence o’ their wage!’

At this Yeb winced, and renewed his acquaintance with the fortifying power of the old tenpenny.

‘Arto baan to yer Yeb’s son-i’-law preych o’ Sundo?’ inquired Billy, in tones of mock solemnity.

‘Wait whal aw’ve gotten one,’ cried Yeb, in tones of exasperation.

‘Thaa’ll hav’ one soon enough, owd lad. When that lass o’ thine weds Jonathan it ’ill be a bit o’ brass aat o’ thy pocket, Yeb, wirnd it?’ asked Sim o’ Tom’s.

‘Yi; he’ll noan sup owd tenpenny then. He’ll be like to put up wi’ aliker (sour ale), willn’d he?’

‘Aw durnd know what yo’ chaps hav’ agen me,’ remonstrated Yeb. ‘Aw’ve said naught to ony on yo, an aw’m noan axing yo’ for naught. Aw’ve as mich reight here as yo’ hav’, an’ if aw pay for what aw get it’s nought to do wi’ yo’;’

and again the old man imbibed freely of the liquor.

During the afternoon and evening others flocked into the taproom, and as the hours passed the chaff became more personal and loud.

‘Arto baan to ax me to th’ weddin’, Yeb?’ asked Dick o’ Mary Ann’s, a sharp-faced youth of two-and-twenty.

‘Nowe, aw’m sure,’ said Billy - baat - cap. ‘He’s o’er flayed thaa’d walk off wi’ another lass, as Jonathan’s baan to do.’

‘We mornd be too hard on th’ owd felley, o’ at once, thaa knows; if thaa taks his lasses thaa taks his wage.’

‘Aw never axed noabry for naught i’ mi life,’ cried Yeb, in tones of suppressed wrath.

‘Nowe, owd lad; thaa’s taken it baat axin’. That lass o’ mine ’at works aside o’ thine tell’d me haa thaa keeps her baat meat while thaa swallers all hoo addles. Hoo mony a time axes her to bite her baggin wi’ her, cose hoo cornd bide to see her clam.’

‘It’s a d——d lie!’ roared Yeb. ‘By Guy! aw’ll make him pay for it as sez it, whoever he

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may be! Aw've a bit o' brass yet; but aw'll spend it i' law afoore aw'll hav' mi character ta'en away like this!

'Haa long hasto had a character, Yeb, thinksto?' asked Billy-baat-cap.

'Ever sin' he licked their Liza wi' his strap and buckle and welly cut her arm off,' quietly replied the man whom Yeb had threatened with law. 'Aw'll tell thee what it is, Yeb, thaa ought to be ashamed o' thisel'. Thaa's as daycent a wife as ever wore shoe-leather, an' as gradely a lot o' lasses as ony i' th' parish, an' thaa does naught but sup away their brass, and when thaa'rt not suppin' thart idlin', an' wur. An' what hasto agen Jonathan? He's a deal too good for th' likes o' thee, if he isn't for th' lass. Sup less ale, lad, and work a bit more, an' tha'll hav' more respect and a char—ac—ter.' This last word being drawn out with strong emphasis.

'What! thaa's turned parson an' o', hasto?' cried Yeb. 'Thaa's nobbud to practise a bit, an' they'll find thee a job up at th' chapel. Thaa'rt a bonny un to preych, an' no mistake. Why, thaa were drunk thisel' last Setterdo neet—aw seed thee.'

‘Yi ; but it wor wi’ mi own brass, owd lad, an’ aw didn’t tak’ it aat o’ other folk. Aw con do wi’ a glass ; but aw pay for ’t, an’ durnd rob noabry else noather.’

This was more than Yeb could bear, so with a slow movement he raised himself from his seat, and, crossing the room, went out, turning his steps towards his home.

He was not drunk—indeed, he seldom was ; only ‘sharp fresh,’ as he called it—fortified for the little duty he had so carefully planned, and which he purposed so speedily to carry out. For all this, he climbed the brow towards his home with timorous step, and was not a little surprised to find himself staggering under what he called ‘a mazy baat.’ It was not the fumes of the tenpenny ; he knew those too well ; no, it was something never felt before. He reeled, then leaned against the wall for support, and, recovering, continued his homeward way. But his tongue felt too large for his mouth—it was as though it were swollen and heavy. Then an uncanny feeling came over him. Were these strange sensations a warning, the loosening of some pin in that firmly-knit frame, a crack in

that solid-set structure? A moment's thought assured him, however, that it was none of these—only a little nervousness induced by the task before him, for, despite the fortification of the tenpenny, he was afraid of his child; he could not overcome the innate dread he had of her.

'Aw think aw'll try a Scotch,' said he, as he passed a public-house. 'It's a dule of a disease 'at whisky willn'd cure;' and with this commonplace of the vulgar on his lips he made his way to the bar, and swallowed a vile decoction that for the moment tingled through all his nerves, and made him feel a stronger man. 'That's better,' said he; 'aw'm more mysel' like—ready for onything, pitch-and-toss or manslaughter, it durnd matter mich. Aw'll mak' yon lass smart to-neet, see if aw durnd! Aw'll peyle (beat or bruise) her till hoo promises hoo'll hav' naught more to do with yon wastril;' and so saying, he unbuckled the strap from his waist, and passed under the door of his dwelling.

A paraffin lamp was burning on the table, at the side of which sat his wife, pale and trembling. The dim flame showed the wreck of a noble womanhood—a wreck wrought by the selfishness



and brutality of man. A book lay open at her side, which she sought to withdraw on his sudden entrance. She was too late, however, for he seized it, and throwing it on the fire, said:

‘None o’ yore Methody rubbidge i’ mi haase.’ Then glaring round, he cried: ‘Where are th’ lasses?’

The woman meekly pointed above.

‘Hasto lost thi tung? Thaa’d—bet—ter—try—an’——’

It seemed as though Yeb had lost his tongue. The sensation was again coming over him; he could not finish his threat. In a little while he recovered himself.

‘Is Sis upstairs, an’ o’?’

‘Yes,’ said the woman.

‘Which room is hoo in?’

‘Hoo’s i’ th’ garret.’

‘Oh! hoo’s i’ th’ garret, is hoo? Hoo thought hoo’d mak’ me climb as mony steps as hoo could, did hoo? O’ reight; aw’ll lay on her as mony times as aw’ve steps to climb—fifteen to th’ chamber, an’ seventeen more to th’ garret—thirty-two, isn’t it? Hoo’ll get thirty-two straps for her trouble, that’s o’.’

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‘Durnd be hard on th’ lass, Yeb; hoo’s nobbud a child, thaa knows, an’ th’ young’st.’

‘Yi, an’ th’ worst. Hoo’s a deal o’ lickin’s to make up for to-neet;’ and the man swung the strap round his head and brought the steel buckle down with a sharp crash on the table, dinting the hard wood. ‘That’ll give her beltinker, aw bet.’

‘Yeb, thaa shalln’d touch yon lass wi’ th’ belt;’ and the woman rose and stood, for once in her life, defiant, between her husband and the stairway door.

‘What sesto?’ cried Yeb, doubting both his eyes and ears.

‘Aw say as thaa shall never touch yon lass wi’ that belt o’ thine, so naa thaa knows.’

‘Stan’ clear, or else aw’ll punse thee!’ shouted Yeb, lifting his clog; but the woman held her ground. ‘Here goes, then;’ and he stepped back for purchase power, so that his iron-shod shoe might the deeper wound the flesh of the woman he had sworn to love.

The kick was never delivered, nor did Yeb ever lift that foot again—a blow from an unseen hand smote him. Another had wielded, not a

buckled strap, but that which did its work more unerringly ; and when his wife stooped over him on the floor she saw a drawn face, with mouth and eye twisted in horrible contortion. Nemesis, good or evil, had overtaken him. He lay in the grip of a stroke.

For upwards of two years Yeb lay helpless, all his moods watched and all his wants met with tenderest solicitude by the wife and children whom in the past he used with so rough a hand. Many a time in his dull mind would he think of days gone by, and in his way thank Providence his purpose towards Sis had been frustrated by another hand, knowing as he did that murder was in his heart on that fateful night. Few wept his death, though there were those who missed in him a type of a rude provincialism that neither religion nor custom was able to tame.



## THE SEVEN STARS.

- I. A FALLEN STAR.
- II. A MOTHER'S WAIL.
- III. LIEE AND DEATH.



I.

A FALLEN STAR.

A STUDENT of human nature would have seen much suggestiveness in the two faces as thrown into relief by the flicker of the fire. Both were shadowed ; but that of Asenath, like an evening sunset after a day of storm, was luminous with prophetic light. The shadow on the girl's face, however, was dark and unrelieved — a shadow not of sorrow, but of shame.

They were strong faces, though Asenath's was the stronger by the stress of forty years, while a line of weakness lurked round the mouth of the girl that found no play on the lips of the elder woman. It was the strength of obedience and the strength of wilfulness—patience wrought by experience, and impatience goaded by restraint. The faces were typical of

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years rather than character—of what one had passed through and of what the other had entered on, and must needs pass through with tears—if she could weep them—and with long hours of pain which no hand could ease.

The younger one was rich and full with the glory of opening womanhood, and, even in shadow, there hung around her the intoxicating charm, that not only betrays an easily yielding nature, but is so seductive to those who come within its zone. The firelight heightened the glow on the rounded cheek and flashed back from the defiant eye, lingering among the stray fringes of hair that crowned the brow, and touching them into an aureole that ill became one so proud and so earthly. And yet, while of the earth, she was of the earth beautiful, and, as ever, it was with this earthly beauty she had ruled, and, in turn, been ruled by those whom she had drawn by her charms.

As the women sat in silence, Asenath wondered how it was such a premium of risk was put on beauty. 'It's strange,' said she, partly to herself—'it's strange that th' devil leaves ill-favored (plain-looking) lasses to



theirsel', while them as th' Almeety mak's gradely lookin' connot walk aat baat bein' fol-lered by all mak's o' rubbidge! There's summat wrang somewhere.' And then, turning to the girl, she said: 'Tira, if thaa'd skenned thaa wouldn'd a' bin as thaa art naa; it's ragged uns, an' bonny uns, at's baan to be pooled at, thaa knows. My mother used to say 'at lasses an' cherries wor painted for their own ill. An' hoo wor reight. Th' rosiest cheeks and th' rosiest cherries go th' first, durnd they?'

'Then yo' mun blame Him as painted 'em, that's o'.'

'Nay, lass; thaa'rt goin' a bit too fur naa. It doesn'd follow becose thaa'rt bonny thaa's ony need to be bad, thaa knows. If thaa'd thi life to come o'er again thaa'd rather carry them een o' thine nor een like skennin' Jane o' th' Fold naa, wouldn't ta?'

The girl made no reply, but continued to look into the fire. She was proud of her beauty, and she knew it; and she knew also Ase-nath was no stranger to the spirit of pride that possessed her. Asenath's rude knowledge of her heart had startled her, and she felt that if

life were hers again, and she held a choice, she would take beauty, despite its risks. Then, turning to the woman, she said :

‘ They might let lasses alone, ony road, Asenath.’

‘ An’ if they did, noan ’ud be as ill off as th’ lasses theirsels. Aw’ve bin a lass, Tira ; an’ it’s human natur’ to be praad o’ bein’ follered by a felley (sweetheart). Th’ Almeety’s made th’ world to go its own gate, an’ we’s be like to go wi’ it. But that doesn’d say as we need mak’ foos o’ aarsels. Does thi faither know?’

‘ Nowe,’ said the girl, shaking her head.

‘ Does onybody know?’

‘ Nobbud them as has guessed.’

‘ Then thaa’s said naught to nobry——

‘ Nowe ; nobbud to thee.’

‘ Well, thaa mun face it like a woman as thaa art. Durnd go and mak’ bad wur. There’s trouble o’ all sort i’ this world ; but thine’s a heavy one becose thaa’s brought it on thisel’ ; but thaa’ll pool through if thaa nobbud does reight. Pike thisel’ together agen as soon as tha’ con, and howd thi yed up. Thaa knows what aw mean ; keep thisel’ to thisel’.’

The girl shook her head, as if doubting the woman's word of prophecy, and a tear glistened in her eye and glinted in the firelight, into which she still steadily looked.

'Ony road, lass, if he ever weds thee, it 'll be by thee keeping him off. There's naught mak's a fellow so fain as lettin' him see as yo' can do baat him. A lass never wants to foller. Hoo should mak' up her mind hoo'll be follered, or be left alone. When thaa's getten it all o'er, keep to thisel', aw tell thee, and he'll wed thee—see if he durnd.'

'Aw durnd think as mi faither 'ill ever forgive me, do yo', Asenath?'

'He'll tak' it hard, aw know, for he's bin some praad o' his lasses—an' he's need to be, an' o'. An' thaa wor awlus his favourite, thaa knows. But thaa's made thi bed, lass, and thaa'll hav to lie on't.'

'Aw could stan' aught if it wirnd for mi faither, Asenath;' and the girl wept convulsively and buried her head in the woman's lap.

'Thaa should ha' thought o' thi faither afoore, lass. After wit, thaa knows, is no wit at all.

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If it were, a mony o' us 'ud be different fro' what we are. Thi faither 'll hav' to be like hundreds afoore him—swallow what he noan likes. It's a deal better nor chewin' it tell yo're sick o'er it.'

'Ey, thaa's a hard un, Asenath,' said the girl, raising her head, and looking up into the face of the strong woman.

'A hard un, am aw, Tira?' replied the woman, taking the rosy cheeks with their ripe, full lips, between her coarse hands—'a hard un, didto say! Then why didto come an' tell me thi trouble, ey? Mi heart fair warchs (aches) for both thee an' thi faither; but heart-warch is noan en'ugh i' th' troubles o' life. Aw'm noan agen folks' pity; but pity's poor stuff if it doesn'd show itsel' in pikin' a body up when they fall. An' then, thaa's summat else to think abaat beside thisel' and thi faither, thaa knows;' and the woman looked steadily into the girl's eyes, who read in them Asenath's meaning, and for the first time there came thoughts of the responsibilities of life in its advent and possibilities. 'Ony road, thaa knows who thi friend is, Tira, an' if aw'm noan soft o'er thee, it doesn'd say as

aw durnd love thee, and will'nd help thee.' And so saying, she stooped and kissed the girl's up-turned face.

'Wilto tell mi faither for me, Asenath?' pleadingly asked the girl.

'Nay, lass. Aw think thaa'd better tell him thisel'.'

'Aw cornd; aw'll leave whom first. Aw cornd face him.'

'Tha'll be like to do it, Tira. It 'll be th' best for thee.'

'Ey, if mi mother had nobbud been alive, aw could ha' tow'd her.'

'Hoo'd ha' needed no tellin', lass. A mother knows all abaat her childer by instinct. But thi mother's i' heaven, thaa knows.'

'An' dun yo' think hoo'll know all abaat it up there?'

'Happen hoo will, but then, they see wi' different een nor we do.'

'Bless yo' for sayin' that, Asenath! mi mother knows aw'm noan a bad un, if mi faither an' other folks think aw am; but haa mun aw tell him?'

'Well, aw'll go wi' thee, for thaa knows it's

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nobbud reight he should know. He's thi faither, howsomever he tak's it.'

'Let's go naa, an' ged it o'er. Mi sisters is up at th' practice, an' he'll be by hissell.'

'Come along, then, th' sooner th' better.'

Old Fenton Lord, as he was called, was largely what his nature and his religion had made him, some of his friends, and not a few of his enemies, declaring that the latter was the cloak of his nature rather than the seamless robe of a renewed heart. He was a proud man—proud of what he used to speak of as his 'high calling,' another name for his religion, and proud of his children, whom he called his 'stars.' There were three things in the observance of which he never failed : he paid his way and ruled his home with diligence ; he read his Bible and said his prayers ; and he never missed the services at the little chapel on the hill. But while he paid his way, he always exacted the uttermost farthing ; and his prayers were unctuous with a gratitude that he was not as other men, while his attendance at the chapel was as perfunctory as his attendance at the

factory where both he and his children worked. The members of the sect to which he belonged spoke of him as a 'pillar of the church,' and no pillar that ever propped a gallery, or carried a roof in sacred shrine, was more stony or cold than he. His life was that of a rude faith in its most exaggerated form; indeed, he was the excrescence of the sect to which he belonged—not a type, but a wen on its healthy, though somewhat grotesque, face. He had seven daughters, whom he used to speak of as his seven stars, and whom he had gone so far as to name after the seven churches. These names, however, were too cumbersome for general use, the neighbours cutting them down for simplicity into crude sobriquets that fell glibly from their tongues.

Little wonder Fenton Lord was proud of his seven daughters, for they were comely girls, and the cynosure of many a young man's eye. Down at the factory, where they ran their looms, they stood head and shoulders above the crowd of weavers among whom they worked, holding at bay many a longing swain who would fain have persuaded them to link their lots with

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them in wedded life. Up at the chapel on the hill they were the leaders among the trebles and contraltos in the choir, and lent their voices lustily to the service of that rural shrine. They were what the villagers called 'clever with their fingers'; using their needles as by instinct, and their cottage home was gay with the adornments of their handiwork. Like the Roman matron, they were held above suspicion; and while the breath of scandal dimmed the lustre of many a girl's character, so far the seven stars had shone resplendent.

On all this their old father had trespassed, not being forgetful to boast, and to credit it to himself and his excellency of training. He was the first to sneer when another man's child went wrong, and ready with his pungent criticism on the home training of those whose lives were broken by slip and stumble. This raised up for him many enemies, and not a few were ready to prophesy that his turn would some day come, and, if the truth must be told, many anticipated that day with no little joy. And yet the girls themselves were without enemies, the favourites of all; yet, at times,



speculation was rife as to which of them would be the child of misfortune when that dark mother should kneel before Fenton Lord's door. Nor was the vulgar and selfish prophecy in vain. Misfortune had come at last, and his threshold was no more sacred than that of any other home in Heatherlow. And the lot had fallen on the bonniest girl, on the brightest of the stars, on her upon whom her father set highest esteem, and on whom he most foolishly doted. Tira had been tempted, and in her temptation proved once more the frailty of womankind.

It was no child's play, no comedy, that lay before Asenath and Tira, and both felt this. How to break the news to the old man they knew not ; yet both felt that broken it must be.

As they walked in the quiet of the evening towards the old man's door neither spoke, so heavy and so uncertain was the immediate hour. At each step Tira thought less and less of herself, and more and more of him whose life was so soon to be rudely awakened by one fell blow. She began to care little as to the consequences

that would fall on her own head, and conjured up the dismay and despair of that proud father's heart when once he knew what she now knew only too well. She pictured him as they would find him—before an open Bible, with spectacled eye, reading of the famous men of old or of their famous words. A hard face, she knew—to many, a face that told of pride and unforgiveness; and yet a face to her ever tender, a face in which she had often read fondness for her girlish moods and ways. And what would be its first expression? Pity or scorn, anger or pain? Well, it was too late now. The sooner over the better for them both!

‘Haaever shall we break th’ news to him, Asenath?’ she asked of the woman who walked at her side.

‘We’ll leave that to th’ minute, lass. Th’ Almeety awlus has a road aat for folk that mak’ up their mind to do th’ thing that’s reight.’

‘Aw’ll tell thaa what, Asenath. Aw think aw’ll let it tak’ its chance an’ say naught abaat it. He’ll find it aat soon en’ugh. Aw cornd stan’ tellin’ him.’

‘He’s know to-neet, or my name’s noan

Asenath. It's as little as thaa con do to tell him, an' sooner thaa get's it o'er wi' an' th' better. Sithee, there's a leet i' his winder. Come on, and God help us!' And seizing the girl's arm, the woman dragged her towards the parental roof.

It was as Tira conjectured. The old man was sitting with spectacled eye over the open Bible, reading of Gideon and Barak and Jephtha. Looking up as they entered, and seeing Asenath, he said :

'What brings thee here, lass? - It's good for sore e'en, an' no mistak', to see thee !'

Seating herself by the fire, Asenath said :

'Tira here is i' trouble, and aw've come wi' her to talk it o'er wi' yo' ;' and then, under her breath, she breathed a prayer of thanks to God, that she had taken her first plunge into the dark waters that lay before them all, and through which father and daughter were about to pass.

'Tira i' trouble?' said the old man, laying aside his spectacles. 'Tira, didto say?'

'Yi,' continued Asenath. 'It's awlus them as we love best as wee'n most to suffer for, isn't it?'

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‘Tira in trouble?’ again asked the old man.  
‘What trouble mut Tira geet into, ey?’

‘Why, it’s one o’ them troubles, thaa knows,  
’at women’s had ever sin’ th’ world started.’

But the old man was dense ; he either would not, or could not, understand.

‘Thaa knows women are awlus i’ ill luck either one way or t’other, arn’d they?’ said Asenath, feeling herself in a tight place.

For a few moments no one spoke, Tira’s father sitting with a blank look on his face, and vainly trying to solve the meaning of Asenath’s enigma, the solution of which was farthest from his mind. At last a light dawned on his face, and he asked :

‘Has hoo getten bagged (discharged) fro’ th’ factory?’

‘It’s summat wur nor that,’ said Asenath, in tones that told of the sorrowfulness of her errand.

‘Has hoo been sayin’ summat as hoo shouldn’d? Hoo were awlus a bad un at keepin’ her tung atween her teeth. Happen they’re baan to sarve me wi’ a writ for summat as hoo’s said ; but aw’m noan baat brass.’

‘ Nowe ; it’s naught hoo’s said.’

‘ Is it summat hoo’s done, then ?’ asked the old man, the nature of the trouble dawning on him.

‘ Yi ; aw believe it is. But thaa mun forgive her, thaa knows.’

The old man bent his head over the Bible, shame and confusion covering his face. He was too proud to weep, and he loved his child too dearly to smite her, or to lose control in his punishment of her. In the twinkling of an eye the wheels had been removed from his triumphal chariot, and he found himself and his children in the slough over which the overwhelming waters were fast flowing. The escutcheon, guarded with such care, was at last blotted with a stain the years could not erase ; his pride was changed to shame.

At last he looked up with tearless eye, and a face sore aged since the breaking of the news, and turning to the girl, he said :

‘ Tira, thaa’rt a fallen star.’

‘ Yi,’ said Asenath. ‘ But hoo’s a star for all that ; an’ one o’ thine, an’ all. Him as is aboon has forgiven th’ lass, an’ thaa mun forgive

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her an o'. Awm 'ill off for thee, Fenton, and for th' lass an' o'. Thaa knows aw've had mi troubles in mi time ; an' if aw've never bin 'shamed by my childer, aw've had to bury 'em. If it doesn'd come i' one way, it comes i' another ; an' we cannot pike for aarsel's—an' happen it's as weel we cornd. But thaa mun stick to Tira, thaa knows ; hoo's thine, though hoo is a fallen star, as thaa co's it.'

'Thaa mut know as aw shall never turn mi back o' one o' mi childer, Asenath ; but aw's never howd my yed up agen. An' thee an' o' Tira—aw could never o' thought it o' thee !'

And that night, long after the stars had set in peaceful slumber—save she who had fallen—the old man sat over the gray ashes of his household hearth, grayer ashes in his bosom and a chill darkness of despair, while low on his horizon hung a black star, shadowing with its gloom the remaining glory of his family constellation.

## II.

### A MOTHER'S WAIL.

It was from the depths of Fenton Lord's nature there came the cry : ' Aw's never howd mi yed up agen.' For long he had held it proudly—held it high above his neighbours ; nor turned it in pity when theirs were hung beneath misfortune and shame. Once more it was the unexpected that happened. His offspring, in whom was his confidence, had failed him ; his favourite child was beneath the shadow of a great shame. He knew that in many a home in the village this would have been taken as a matter of course ; the circumstance was common, and little was thought of it. But it was *his* home—*his* child. He had staked all on the faith that his girls were not as other girls ; and now the choicest of them had proved to him,

and to the neighbours, that she was of like passions with the rest. He felt that it would have been better to bury her in an odour of respectability than keep her a living example of disgrace. Yet he held no feelings of revenge towards the girl. The thought of turning her adrift never came into his mind; nor was he morally incensed. The cry of his heart was the cry of pride; the poignancy to him was in the discovery, the publicity, and the sneers of those whom he had upbraided in like hours of family sorrow. The awfulness of the sin was in its punishment, and in its punishment on himself.

Lord, like old Yeb, was a man of slow mental processes, but when once his mind was fixed it remained immovable. Throughout the months prior to the day he dreaded, he planned and re-planned how best to meet the misfortune, his own pride ever the uppermost factor. Now, pride is cruel and relentless. No wonder, therefore, that the old man's wish was dark—so dark that at times, hard as he was, he shrank from it. Yet he found himself cherishing it, and hugging its ugliness to his heart. At dead of night,



when the wind smote his moorland home, and sweeping rains lashed his lattice, he would toss and tumble, haunted by the vision of a little child, new-born, *but dead*—a tiny form whose advent meant a nameless grave in a shadowy corner of the lone churchyard ; and as he saw in his vision the stealthy tread of the nurse with burdened arms, and followed her along the winding upland path to watch her return empty-handed, he started as he heard himself repeat ‘ Amen.’

Yes ; this was the thought cherished by Lord —so cherished that he found himself praying for its realization ; and he had said ‘ Amen ’ to a little child’s untimely death. And all to save his pride. He alone needed, called for, atonement ; a father’s honour, rather than that of his daughter, must be appeased, and appeased by death.

And if the child were alive, and lived, what then ? For that possibility faced him. Then it must be banished. There were those who would remove it and nurse it—homes, far away, where nameless little ones bore the brand of a shame of which they were guiltless—banished

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because of pride that would not brook memory, because of society that counted maternity a question of law, and not of love.

Thus, in the narrow circle of pride and self, the old man reasoned. He loved Tira, and meant to keep her ; he loathed her disgrace, and meant to banish the thing that would be a reminder of it to himself and to others. He held a dim idea that the presence of the child would keep open the sore, and that in its absence time would heal, and administer the potion of forgetfulness, in which the memory of so many deeds is lost.

One evening, as Fenton Lord sat in the clogger's shop, Asenath, with a woman's tact for turning out the contents of a man's mind, succeeded in drawing the wishes and purposes of the old man into actual expression.

'What !' she exclaimed, 'thaa doesn'd mean to say thaa wishes that? Why, thaa'rt wur nor Herod. Thaa'rt seekin' th' young child's life. He were flayed o' his throne, an' thaa'rt flayed o' thi pride ; that's thy kingdom—thi pride—doesto yer? Durnd thee begin o' playin' wi' th' Almeety. He'll go His own gate for thee or

onybody else. Tak' thi trouble like a gradely mon, an' stuff thi pride up th' chimbly. Yo' cornd hav' childer baat takin' your chances wi' 'em. They're certain care, but uncertain comforts, and yo' mun sup both th' bitter and th' sweet. A mon's a foo', an' a woman is, for that matter, 'at builds ony hopes on 'em. Thaa's noan read that Bible o' thine to mich use, if that's o' thaa con say an' do naa thaa'rt i' trouble.'

'If th' child lives, 'Senath, it 'll hav' to goa. Aw'll noan hav' it i' mi haase. So naa thaa knows!'

'What's th' child done amiss?' asked Elijah.

'It's not what it's done, 'Lijah, but what it will do.'

'Why, haa doesto know what it 'll do? Tha'll give it a chonce, surely?'

'Yi; aw'll give it a chonce; but not at whom. Aw'll see it's done well by, but aw'll noan hav' it abaat me. Th' world's wide en'ugh for both on us, an' aw'll noan hav' it in my gate.'

'Well, Lord, thaa wor awlus a foo' when thaa made up thi mind,' said Elijah.

'An' thaa wor awlus a foo' in making it up

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and o', added the keen-tongued woman. 'But thaa'rt wur nor a foo' this time—thaa's a brute! Where's th' difference between th' child an' one o' your own?'

'Thaa knows th' difference, 'Senath, baat me tellin' yo'.'

'There's happen a difference to them as skens wi' pride, but i' th' cen o' th' Almeety there's no difference at o', so aw tell yo'. A child's a child, howsomever it comes; an' if it comes to your haase and yo' kick it aat, God 'll send in th' bill for thee to saddle some day. See if He doesn'd.'

'O' reight! aw'se noan ax thee to help me saddle it when it comes.'

'Sithee, Lord, thi pride's poisonin' thee! And so saying, Asenath pushed past him out of the clogger's shop, where the conversation had been held.

When the men were alone Elijah laid aside the clog on which he had been working, and looking steadily into Lord's face, said :

'Thaa doesn't mean what thaa ses, doesto? Surely thaa'll never foundlin' yon child?'

'Yo've yerd o' th' Medes and Persians, 'Lijah?'

'Yi ; aw've yerd on 'em.'

'Well, thaa knows when Fenton Lord mak's up his mind, he belongs to th' same breed.'

'Jackass breed, tha' means—breed as awlus go their own gate. Well, aw've known a few broken necks and sore shins i' that gate i' mi time. Thaa mun mind thaa doesn't tumble, that's o'.'

Fenton Lord gathered himself together in high dudgeon, and muttering something about 'folk sweepin' their own doorsteps,' walked towards home, strong in his own conclusions and righteous in the wrath he nursed towards the innocent ; proud, too, that he was of the Medes and Persians, that changed not, though all he knew of them was that they were 'i' th' Scripters.'

Tira's life hung on a thread ; or, as the doctor put it, 'it was a case of touch and go.' She lay, poor girl, unconscious, and consumed with a fever that refused to submit to the allaying hand of science and the tender ministrations of love. A bladder, filled with ice, was suspended from the chamber ceiling, and allowed to rest on her

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burning brow, and morning, noon, and night, her watchful sisters took the temperature that told of the obdurate flame. There were restless tossings and incoherent ravings; while in intervals of lucidity the girl cried out after the little life that had been removed, for the laws of the Medes and Persians were once more irrevocable, and Fenton Lord had carried off the 'chance child,' as he called it, to a home for foundlings. Through those long days and still longer nights no one was oftener at the sick girl's side than Asenath, soothing as best she could with snatches of hymns, and fanning the cheeks no longer aflame with beauty, but with the deadly poison that too often haunts the natal bed. Day after day the girl lived on, her strong constitution doing brave battle with death. Many a time and oft did they think her last breath drawn, and yet she rallied—rallied only to relapse, and put out the flicker of hope she had kindled anew in the anxious hearts of the watchers.

Of all who waited for the crisis, none waited in such terrible tension as old Lord himself, and many and earnest were his prayers for his child's

recovery. He had spent whole nights on his knees, only a partition between the room where he knelt and pleaded and the room wherein lay the sick girl. And yet his prayers all seemed in vain; the child of his heart continued to hover on that side the border line pointing to the grave.

One night, as Asenath and Ephy, the eldest sister of the sick girl, watched by the bedside, a gleam of consciousness flitted over the patient's face—a gleam only, but Asenath saw it, and with her experience she knew that the hour of crisis was at hand. Keeping her eye fixed on the sufferer, she noted its return, this time brighter and more intelligent, and accompanied by a cry, faint indeed, and almost inarticulate—a cry plaintive and heart-reaching:

‘Asenath, where's mi child?’

In Asenath's life of manifold sorrows many were the cries that had pierced her heart. She had heard children—her own children—cry out in suffering, and strong men groan in pain; but this cry of Tira for her child tortured her as never before, and her whole soul went out in a suppressed sob.

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‘Asenath, where’s mi child?’

On the other side of the partition she heard the stifled prayers of the father asking for the girl’s recovery. Now and again the words were distinct enough to be caught. Then they died down to mutterings—a mere murmur, yet how ominous at this midnight hour!

‘Asenath, where’s mi child?’

And the girl looked round the bed, and feebly raised the clothes, keenly eyeing the folds, as if to find the little offspring there. But it was all for naught. She looked in vain.

And still the father prayed, little thinking that an act wrought by his own pride was risking the life for which he sought at the hands of God.

Asenath never forgot those two voices. They rang in her ears in after-years—rang in the stillnesses of the night as she heard them then; rang out when she could not sleep—the voice of a daughter whose offspring a father had robbed—the voice of a father who pleaded for the life of the daughter he had wronged.

A terrible strain was now on Asenath. She knew the girl’s life hung on the gratification of



this her first conscious wish, and she knew how hard it would be to gain its grant. In a moment her mind became a playground of probabilities; and these, with the lightning speed of thought, she balanced. He who was now praying for his child held the answer to his prayer in his own hands. But would he answer that for which he asked? Faithless prayers were bad enough, but not so bad or hopeless as the prayer of pride.

*'Spare her life, Lord!'*

The words were sobbed out, and sounded through the lath and plaster wall. And the girl's life might be spared, and spared by him who prayed for it.

'Asenath, gi' me mi child. Sithee! aw want it here;' and the girl bared her bosom, as though to nourish the little life, the advent of which she now recalled in the first luminous stage of her long illness.

'Hooisht, lass! thaa mun keep quiet. Thaa cornd hav' th' child while thaa's so ill, thaa knows. Thaa mun wait till thaar't strong, thaa knows.'

*'Aw mun hav' it naa, Asenath.'*

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And the girl rose in bed and put out her long arms, now lean and shapeless as sticks, as if in wild entreaty. 'Aw mun hav' it naa.'

'But thaa cornd, lass. Th' doctor will'nd let thee, thaa knows. Thaa mun get better first.'

'Aw'se soon be better wi' th' child, Asenath. Fotch it, doesto yer?'

The girl was becoming frantic in her gesticulation and wild in her excitement, her unnatural strength threatening a relapse, which Asenath saw approaching. So laying the girl back on her pillow, she said :

'Naa, Tira, thaa mun hush thee an' be quiet, an' aw'll go for th' child.'

*'Spare her life, Lord !'*

Once more the words were sobbed out, and sounded in muffled tones through the wall from the adjoining room, and as she again heard them Asenath took on herself a mighty resolve.

Leaving the sick girl on pretence of fetching the child, Asenath gently opened the chamber-door, and saw before her the bent form of the old man as he bowed over the bed.

For a moment she paused, and the words fell on her ears—words piteous, yet, as her instinct

told her, still words of pride. There was one who wanted his own way in two directions, and God was offering him his choice of one only. He could keep his daughter if he chose to restore her child. He could keep his pride, but at the cost of his daughter. Asenath saw it all, and with a woman's instinct prepared herself for her task.

Going up to the bent figure, she touched him and said :

‘ Lord, aw want thee. Durnd mak’ a noise, but come wi’ me daan into th’ kitchen.’

‘ Hoo’s not dead, is hoo?’ gasped the old man.

‘ Nowe ; hoo’s not dead ; but there’s nobry but thee con keep her alive.’

‘ What doesto mean, Asenath?’

‘ Come along wi’ me, an’ aw’ll tell thee ;’ and so saying, she led the self-willed man, like a lamb, down the stone stairway into the room below.

‘ Fenton Lord,’ she said, after seating him in the chair by the now fireless grate—‘ Fenton Lord, supposin’ th’ Almeety laft it wi’ thee to answer thi own prayer for Tira, what would ta do?’

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‘What would aw do, sesto?’

‘Yi; and mind haa thaa answers.’

‘Why, aw’d do aught.’

‘Then tell me where thaa’s sent th’ babby to.’

It required some little time before the old man, with his sluggish mind, grasped the full meaning of Asenath’s words; but when he did, he rose in his wrath and pushed the woman from him, saying :

‘Durnd come thi fause ways o’er me. That child o’ sin ’ll never cross mi’ threshold!’

‘O’ reight; then Tira will, an’ feet fermest an’ o’; an’ noan so long first, noather—that’s all. Naa thaa con go on wi’ thi prayin’, an th’ Almeety ’ll laugh at thee. He’s gien thee thi chance, an’ thaa willn’d tak’ it.’ And Asenath went back to the sick-room.

‘Hasto brought th’ child?’ asked Tira, as soon as the woman entered.

‘Not yet, lass. Ephy here mun run for th’ doctor. Happen he’ll let thee hav’ it; we mun ax him first. Run off, Ephy, as fast as thaa con an’ fotch him. And naa, Tira, thaa mun sleep a bit, thaa knows, an’ get strong enough to look

at thi child.' And so saying, she soothed as best she could the restless and expectant girl.

Meanwhile the old man was pondering the words of Asenath. Slowly his dull brain turned them over and over, and sought to draw out of them their meaning. He had called her 'fause' (cunning, sly); but was she? Was she not one who always carried a meaning in her words that was sincere? And yet, how could the return of a babe save the life of his girl? Had she not a doctor and medicine? Was he not praying for her? If these failed, what else could succeed? Women, he knew, were fanciful. Yes, and after all, women were false. Was he being tricked? was it all a plant—a ruse—to master by wile his determined will? There was no depth to woman's scheming. He would show them that in vain the net was set for his feet. No one in the village besides himself knew the whereabouts of the child, and no one should.

And so, sheathing in his pride his few remaining qualms of heart, he clambered once more to his chamber to beseech the Almighty to save his daughter.

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Asenath continued to soothe the girl as best she could, bidding her wait the doctor's arrival, and promising her the babe for her arms when she was strong enough to hold it, all the while catching the muttered words from the adjoining room :

*'Spare her life, Lord!'*

Suddenly there was a shriek—a loud, piteous shriek—louder far than the old man's prayers, and more importunate, not only startling him, but rending the air of night and travelling far along the village street. It was the shriek of robbed maternity coming from a heart rudely emptied of its treasure ; the cry of one who for the first time realized that its nest had been left unto it desolate ; a half-life going out in passionate entreaty after the other half, lost somewhere in an unsearchable void. The old man heard it, and ceased his prayers. The doctor, too, as he hurried up the stairs, heard it, and knew its import. It was a mother's prayer for the restoration of what the world called her 'chance child.'

When silence once more settled on the house, the old man stole in his stockinged feet to the

sick girl's door, that stood ajar, and as he did so he heard the doctor say :

‘Give her back her child, and she'll live.’

But the child was far away, and only one in that house knew its whereabouts.

### III.

#### LIFE AND DEATH.

THERE was the sound of importunate beating on the door of the public-house, the sound of a hand in eager haste.

The lights had been out for upwards of an hour, and the sleepy landlord, no longer disturbed by his customers' hilarity, slept soundly, his good wife by his side, both unconscious of the storm of blows rained on the door of their hostel.

Louder and yet louder rang the summons, still falling on obdurate ears. Then the knocking was accompanied by a voice, vociferous and imperative in its tone—a voice that at last reached the dull senses of the sleeping pair.

‘What’s that, lass?’ asked the landlord, breaking short in one of his snores.



‘Some drunken chap as wants sarving after haars. Plague tak’ his dry throttle! Why cornd he go quietly whom?’

‘Nay, it’s no drunken chap,’ said the now awakened man. ‘Aw like as though aw know that voice. Hooisht! It’s Fenton Lord’s, or aw’m mistaan.’

‘What mun Fenton Lord want wi’ us? Thaa knows he’s a teetotal. An’ if he wurnd, he’d noan be after drink at this time o’ neet an o’. Aw tell thee, it’s some drunken foo’ as ought to be awhom i’ bed, as we are.’

‘Are yo’ baan to oppen this dur? Aw’ll punce it in if yo’ durnd, so naa!’ And the speaker’s foot came into lively contact with the resisting woodwork.

‘Thaa’s reight, lad : yon’s Fenton Lord, an’ no mistak’. What i’ th’ name o’ fortin’s brought him here at this time o’ th’ neet? Put thi yed aat o’ th’ winder an’ ax him. There’s summat up to fotch him at this haar.’

The landlord tumbled on the floor, none too pleased at the summons, and opening the lattice, cried :

‘Well, what is’t?’

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‘Is that thee, David?’

‘It wor when aw went to bed.’

‘Aw want thee to put thi mare i’ th’ trap an’ drive me to Bruntleigh—an’ look slippy abaat it an’ o’!’

‘What ses to?’ cried the landlord, doubting his ears.

‘Put th’ mare i’ th’ shafts an’ drive me to Bruntleigh. Arto a foo’?’

‘Nowe, but aw think thaa art!’

‘Look thee here, Dave, noan o’ thi marlocks. It’s a life and death job—an’ there’s brass at th’ end on’t an’ o’.’

‘Does he say there’s brass at th’ end on’t?’ asked the woman, who sat up in bed, with ears alert.

‘Yi,’ said David, turning round from the window to answer his wife.

‘Then don thi cloathes an’ be off wi’ thee, for there’s noan too mich stirrin’ naa-a-days.’

When the landlord reached the door and opened it, Fenton Lord rushed in, followed by a shawled woman, whom David at once saw to be Asenath.

‘What th’ ferrups is up? Thee an o’,

Asenath!' exclaimed David. 'Has th' world come to an end, or summat?'

'Ax no questions, lad,' said the woman in that cold, calm voice that always levied obedience. 'Do as thaa'rt towed, an' see thaa doesn'd let th' grass grow under thi feet. Thaa'lt be paid for o' thaa does, as Lord's tell'd thee. We're noan baat brass.'

'Yo' want th' mare puttin' i' th' trap, yo' say, and drivin' o'er to Bruntleigh? Why, it's ten mile or more.'

'Never thee mind if it's ten hundred ; do as thaa'rt towed, an' durnd be long abaat it,' said the woman. And David turned to obey.

Although he was but a few minutes in his preparation, to the waiters the time appeared interminable. They thought his boots long in the lacing and his hat in the finding. Then it was as though the harness would never fit the mare, or the mare back into the shafts. Every strap and buckle seemed as though it were stupid, resisting where it ought to have slipped into its place. When all was in order, and in readiness as they supposed for the start, the whip was missing, and the landlord returned to

search for it in the house. At last they drove off, and, despite the spanking speed at which they started, Fenton Lord cried out at what he deemed the slowness of the pace.

‘Gi’e me howd o’ that whip,’ said he; and, snatching it out of the hands of David, he laid it round the ears of the mare, forcing her into a wild gallop.

‘Luk here, owd lad, if thaa con poo’ a warp, it doesn’d say as thaa con drive a horse. Hoo’s going ten mile an haar, an’ if that doesn’d suit thee, thaa con get aat an’ walk—so naa.’

‘Ten mile an haar! an’ we’re ten mile fro’ Bruntleigh. That means death, Asenath; for sure it does!’ said Lord.

‘It does to th’ mare—choose haa,’ replied David. ‘An’ to thee an’ me if th’ trap goes o’er.’

‘We’s be like to bide aar time, lad,’ advised the woman. ‘Thaa’s run Him as is aboon a bit too close this time, but happen He’ll show His mercy at after all.’

‘What are yo’ two talkin’ abaat? Aw’m noan takin’ one o’ yo’ to th’ ’sylum, am aw? Aw’m baan to turn back if aw am. Yo’re noan

baan to get me into ony plaguy mess, aw con tell yo'.' And so saying, he reined up the mare.

'Drive on, David, or aw'll pitch thee aat an' drive misel' ;' and, laying his hand on David's collar, Fenton Lord gave it a threatening shake of unmistakable meaning.

It was a midsummer night, clear and cool with freshest air. The stars were in glorious evidence, and dim outlines told where the mighty hills were sleeping. Around lay a country dotted with scattered farms and patches of forest, showing black on the dull stretch of landscape. The road along which they travelled was skirted on each side by walls of rudely-built stone, moss-grown and fern niched, bent and twisted with many a winter's storm. Here and there a lone house was passed, the clatter of the mare's feet awakening the slumbering dogs, which, with short, sharp bark, welcomed and farewellled the speeding journeyers. In a half-hour the moors were reached, where all was void and silence — great stretches of wild herbage, in the daytime crossed by the chasing cloud shadows, and at night seen by the stars.

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The long grasses, as they waved in the night wind, seemed to start and raise their spiraled blades at the sound of the sharp click of the horse's footfall, while its distant echo disturbed the wild-fowl in their heathery haunts. There was a hush in the heavens, and on the earth the listening ear, while the travellers were mute, the one with wonder, the other two with suspense and fear.

Click, click, went the mare's feet in quick time and sharp tattoo, needing neither whip nor word to keep the pace, David holding a steady rein, and Fenton Lord ejaculating shreds of piteous prayer, while Asenath, with her eye on the heavenly watchers, wondered in which mansion of light her little Samuel was looking down on the sorrow-throbbing earth.

Click, click! How monotonous the hoofbeats grew! As the minutes passed Fenton Lord began to hear them in his brain, and then it seemed as though his poor aching head were under the horse's feet, and that the sharp ring of the iron shoes was beating mercilessly upon him.

Click, click, answered the echoes. From distant mounds it was carried back again to the

travellers, and the air caught it and played with it, and sent it far over the moorlands, where it died away on the rush-fringed waterbeds and amid the wastes of ferns.

Now it would keep time to a familiar air, or beat out monotonous threnodies in the minds of those whom it haunted ; or it would speak as the hollow voice of Fate, and proclaim its message of despair. And then it would tell of the passing moments—moments on which life hung—moments that perchance beat out the life of suffering, and told how one pulse less had fallen with the falling hoof. To Fenton Lord on that night it sounded more than once as the clock-beat of fate.

But time and the hour run through the longest night, and end the wearisomest of journeys. As the dawn lit the eastern sky the tall chimneys of Bruntleigh were dimly seen, and Lord and Asenath thanked God that at last one half of the suspense was done with.

‘That’s th’ haase,’ said Lord—‘that on th’ top o’ th’ broo (hill) there. Drive up to’t, David.’ And David turned the horse’s head in the direction indicated.

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It was a low, gray-stone house, dilapidated and lonesome, built in by high fences, over which hung the leafless branches of trees long since dead. It stood in a zone of desolation, and was ever chilled by its own shadow, or the shadow cast by the enclosing walls. No flowers grew in its garden ; even the plots of grass were mildewed and bare. Lying out of the beaten track, there were few who visited it, and the few who did sought secrecy in their call. During the day the voices of children haunted its precincts—sometimes joyous voices, but oftener voices of pain and weariness. Here, from time to time, under shadow of night, little babies were left—left in secret to save a family's pride, left with those whose only end was to gain a selfish livelihood. Those amongst them who lived went out into the world in after-years knowing not who they were, and those who died lay with no stone to mark their grave.

'Drive round to th' back, David,' said Lord.

They drove round to where a door opened from the fence wall into the garden. All was hushed, however—the little ones and their keeper were asleep.



In another moment Lord was knocking at the door as two hours before he had knocked at the door of David's hotel ; but his blows were more timorous, and marked by nervous haste.

A great hound warned him by its savage bark—a hound with which the children sported in their hours of play, their only friend on these lonesome heights.

As the knocking became louder the hound became more fierce, until at last a woman's face was thrust in fear out of an upper window, startled and pale with the early and ruthless summons.

It was a hard, passionless face, set off with close-drawn hair of iron gray. The mouth was large and gap-toothed, and the voice set in a key whose harshness smote the ear of the motherly Asenath.

‘Have yo’ brought summat?’ she asked.

‘No,’ said Asenath ; ‘we’ve come for summat—for that baby-boy yo’ geet a two-thre weeks sin’ fro Heatherlow.’

‘What dun yo’ want wi’ him? Th’ child’s reight enough!’

‘That’s none o’ yore bis’ness. Let me hav th’ child.’

‘Yo’ con hav’ th’ child if yo’ve gotten th’ papers an’ th’ brass.’

‘We’ve gotten both, lass. Let’s hav’ th’ child! Time’s precious!’ cried Lord in impatient tones.

‘O’ reight; aw’ll be daan in a minute.’

When the woman came down she admitted Fenton Lord and Asenath into the kitchen—a huge, desolate room, with whitewashed walls, its floor strewn with broken furniture, amongst which were sundry cradles and children’s chairs. On the dresser stood a number of unwashed mugs and feeders, a basin half filled with milk, and a pot of soothing mixture for restless and pain-smitten infancy. A sour odour hung in the air—an odour of filth and unwashed flesh, sickening to the smell; and the floor was stained and slippery.

When the woman had looked at the papers presented by Lord, and taken his money, she went aloft for the child. Then Asenath turned on him, and said :

‘So this is th’ hoile wheer yo’ sent th’ little un, is it?’

Lord groaned, and said :

‘Durnd, Asenath.’

‘Yo’ may weel say “durnd.” Aw couldn’t ha’ thought it o’ yo’, Fenton. An’ wi’ all yore prayin’ an’ o’. Why, aw wouldn’t send a kittlin’ to sich a shop as this. Thaa deserves thi yers (ears) pooin’ as long as shoe-tees (ties)!’

‘Aw do, Asenath, an’ yo’ con poo’ ’em if yo’ like,’ blubbered Lord.

‘Nay ; aw’ve summat else to do. Aw’m ill off for yon lass o’ thine. Aw’m feard hoo’s dead by this.’

‘Durnd say that, Asenath. Tell th’ owd woman to be quick.’

But the old woman was as anxious to be quick as they were, and in a few minutes she returned with the baby in her arms.

‘Hav’ yo’ brought aught to lap it in?’

‘Yi. Sithee, here’s a shawl. Thaa mut warm it a sup o’ milk afoore we go,’ said Asenath. And the food was warmed over a paraffin stove.

Then commenced the homeward journey of David, Lord, and Asenath, the latter with the little one near her warm, motherly bosom.

Heatherlow was yet asleep when they reached the house of Fenton Lord, in the doorway of which stood one of the 'Seven stars' awaiting the return.

Leaping from the cart, Lord cried:  
'Is hoo livin'?'

His daughter nodded, and her father cried out, 'Thank God!' and then burst into tears.

Then it was the calm common-sense of Ase-nath asserted itself. Quietly she stepped out of the cart with her precious burden, and, seating herself in the kitchen, unshawled the babe, thankful to find it asleep.

There it lay, with heaven's innocence on its restful face.

'Poor little un! thaa's done naught wrang. Him as took childer on His knees would never ha' turned thee away fro' whom. Nowe; He would ha' blessed thee, choose what thi mother had done. It's a weary world when such like as thee has to suffer for other folks' sin. But Him aboon knows all abaat thee. He's thi Faither, whoever else is. But thaa's gotten a mother, thank God! an' hoo loves thee.'

And then, rising to her feet, she climbed the

stairs to Tira's chamber, and, placing the child in the girl's arms, she said to the watching sisters :

'Naa then, lasses, let's leave 'em alone a bit ; they'll be better by theirsels.'

For many a day Tira's life was despaired of, the cruel strain and shock almost doing their fatal work. But a strong constitution and Asenath's care conquered death, and as the autumn drew on, the scales turned in the girl's favour. There were weary hours when she wished herself dead, days in which she cursed her folly, and found no ease from the hell of her shame. But Asenath ministered to the mind diseased ; nor was there sentiment in her ministration. Her puritanism was too stern for that ; no half-lights glimmered in her morality. She would sit with her Bible on her knee and tell how the God of the Hebrews fortified the sacredness of home. And then, as despair wrung the girl's heart, she would read of one who loved much because she had been much forgiven. And as Tira saw a gleam of hope her pulse began to beat with healthy life.

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But the flower of her life was gone, and she trod a shadowed path. There was One, however, who in His exacting penalties did not forget to be gracious. And as the years passed, and time told its tale on her once beautiful face, the heart found ease in her child.

Tira still lives a quiet, lonesome life on her native wilds. Her son lives, too, his name well known to many a northern church.

Not long ago old Fenton Lord was laid to rest in the little chapel-yard among his forbears, and his last words were those of gratitude that he buried his pride 'i' th' place o' berryin' Tira.'

ENOS TAKES HIS FIRST AND LAST  
CARRIAGE DRIVE.





## ENOS TAKES HIS FIRST AND LAST CARRIAGE DRIVE.

ENOS was one of the few men in Heatherlow without enemies. He sometimes would say, as he talked with the saints at the chapel on the hill, that he 'were ill off when he thought o' th' Maister's words, "Woe unto yo' when all men speak well o' yo'," and confessed, in his simplicity, that he'd 'feel more reight if a two-thre folk would set on an' throw stones at him.' But no hand was raised against Enos. All trusted him, and as many as possessed hearts loved him.

When he was too old to work, he still hung round the factory yard and spent many hours in the warehouse, proud of his lifelong connection with the firm. He had seen three generations of masters. He used to tell how he came as a

lad 'wi' th' owd maister fro' Bruntleigh, when they sold a calf to buy a two-thre warps wi', while his memory stored every incident in the building up and prosperity of the firm. He was one of the last of a race of servants who claimed no rights. His religion held two spheres—the chapel and the factory; and his two authorities were 'Him up aboon' and 'th' maister.' By these he swore—they were his lords.

When the 'owd maister' retired from the firm, Enos took it sorely to heart. To use his own expression, 'he wor off his meat' for months. For a little while all interest in his labour failed, for the old spot was haunted by an absence. Then came a fire, and the mill was gutted. This was the great trial of his life, and it was years before he overcame the loss. He had been wont to walk round the old factory on summer evenings, looking up at its gray stories and iron-framed windows, counting its stones and reviewing its history. Indeed, if it had not been for his religion, he would have been incorporate into it—but Zion on the hill divided the claims. Nothing so suited him as to recall

some little incident in the past, either of the mill or its masters, and recount it to listening ears.

When wages went up, Enos refused the rise ; and when the firm insisted he should be paid as other men, he persistently refunded what he deemed to be excess in his new rate of payment.

One summer's afternoon, as the newly-married wife of the youngest master was looking through the window of her husband's office, old Enos passed, and, glancing up, raised his cap in respect to her presence.

'Who is this old man, Frank? Be quick—he is going!'

Mr. Frank at once sprang to his feet in time to see Enos pass under the warehouse door.

'Oh, that,' said he, 'is old Enos, whom you have heard us speak of so often.'

'Oh, is that Enos? I want to see him, Frank. I must have him up at our house. He shall drive home with me this afternoon.'

'Catch him at it!' said Frank. 'He might perhaps walk up, if he were strong enough ;

we should have to send him on an errand, however. As to getting him into a carriage—the idea is out of the question. He never was in one in his life.’

‘He’ll drive in one to-day,’ said Mrs. Frank, with a significant nod of her head. ‘Send for him, Frank. I want to see him so much.’

Enos was sent for, and in due time appeared. He had been a tall man, but was now bent with years. His face was lit up with a benignant light, and his long white hair covered by a closely-fitting cap. The fustian jacket which he wore showed many a neatly-wrought patch, and his trousers shone with grease and long hours of factory toil. He was shod with clogs—the great heavy wooden-soled shoes so much in vogue among the operatives.

‘Did yo’ want me, Maister Frank?’ said the old man, as he stood at the doorway of the inner office.

‘Yes. Come in, Enos. I want to introduce you to my wife.’

‘Well, hoo’s a bonny un, an’ no mistak’. But yo’ awlus knew a pratty lass, Mr. Frank, when yo’ seed one.’

‘What does he say, Frank?’ asked the young wife, ignorant of the vernacular.

‘Oh, nothing, my dear. He says you are pretty, you know’—this with some confusion.

‘Thank you, Enos,’ said the frank little woman—‘thank you for the compliment. I know you mean it. But does not my husband deserve a pretty wife—eh?’

‘Yi. God bless him! he does, an’ o’. He’s reight for royalty, is Maister Frank.’

‘Well, Enos, I’ve secured my queen.’

‘An’ hoo’s a gradely un, an’ o’,’ said Enos; and he stood looking hard at the beauties of the girl-wife. And then, as if jealous of the old family, Enos continued:

‘But hoo’s no better nor yore mother wor when hoo wor a lass, Maister Frank. Aw remember when yore faither brought her to Heatherlow forty years sin; there were no een like hers on th’ country-side, nor i’ th’ caanty noather; an’ her yure were like a raven’s, Maister Frank, it wor. Yore mother ’ll take some beatin’—as hoo wor when hoo wor a girl, aw mean, yo’ know.’

‘Yes, Enos. I understand.’

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‘Hoo’s nobbud a young un, and hoo’s nobbud a little un,’ continued Enos, never taking his eyes off the girl.

‘What’s that, Frank?’

‘He says you are only young, and only small.’

‘But hoo does credit to th’ family,’ continued Enos, as though to correct or tone down his criticism.

‘That’s right, Enos. I’m glad you commend my choice. But my wife wants you to go home with her in the carriage. It’s waiting at the office door now—see!’

‘What!’ exclaimed Enos, letting his cap fall on the floor in his confusion.

‘Mrs. Frank wants you to go home with her in the carriage.’

‘Nowe, Maister Frank, aw couldn’t for shame. Aw’m noan fit to ride with th’ likes of yo’ an’ yore misses.’

‘Nonsense, Enos; we’re all of one blood—money doesn’t make the man. Come along.’ And he pushed the old man towards the door.

‘There’s a deal o’er mony o’ yore way o’ thinkin’, Maister Frank—leastways, abaat this

place there is. Jack's as good as his maister naa-a-days. When aw wor a lad both Jack an' his maister knew their places, and kep' 'em.'

'That's all very well, Enos, for yesterday. But we are radicals now.'

'Yi ; and yore radicals 'll blow yo' into jamrags (ruins or shreds of anything).'

'Go on, you old Jeremiah—go on, and get into the carriage, and drive home with my wife.' And so saying, the young master pushed the old servant towards the door.

'Nowe, Maister Frank, aw willn'd go. Aw wouldn't ha' done it by yore faither, an' aw willn'd do it by yo'.'

'Now, Enos,' said the resistless little wife, looking up with all the winsomeness of her girlish face into the rheumy eyes of the old man—'now, Enos, you cannot refuse me.' And she laid her little, tightly-gloved hand on the greasy coat-sleeve of the faithful servant, and drew him towards the waiting carriage.

'Maister Frank, yo've gotten a maister at last, aw con tell yo', an' no mistak'. But aw'm noan goin' i' th' carriage for o' that.'

'What!' said Mrs. Frank, still looking into

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the simple dignity of the old man's face—' what! will you say "No" to me?'

'Aw feel bun to.'

'What, Enos! when it's your master's orders?'

'But hoo's noan mi maister. If yo' gave th' order, it 'ud be different thaa sees. Aw never disobeyed one o' th' gaffers o' this shop i' mi life, an' aw've worked here, man an' boy, for fifty year.'

'Then it's my order that you drive home with my wife in the carriage,' said Mr. Frank in mock authority; and the old man stepped into the brougham.

They had not driven far before old Enos turned to the laughing girl at whose side he sat, and said :

'Aw'll tell yo' what, Mrs. Frank — aw'd rayther be i' th' hot well o' yon engine-haase nor i' this machine.'

Poor Enos! he knew not how to place his legs; for once in his life they were too long for him. Nor dare he move lest he should spoil the finery of the little lady at whose side he sat. Lean back he would not, for he was afraid of the



cushions, while the gentle spring of the carriage was a torture to his old bones.

‘Aw ax yore pardon,’ said Enos, as the brougham gave a slight lurch and rolled him over on the shoulder of the young wife—‘aw ax yore pardon, but aw cornd help it.’

‘Oh, never mind me, Enos. We shall be at home soon.’

‘An’ what dun yo’ want wi’ me when yo’ get me there?’

‘Oh, I don’t know. I want you to drink my health.’

‘Do yo’ mean sup wine?’

‘Yes; in honour of our wedding, you know.’

‘But aw’m a Rechabite.’

‘What is that, Enos?’

‘A watter drinker, yo’ know.’

‘Oh yes, I know. A teetotaller, you mean.’

‘Yo’ han it naa.’

‘Well, we can manage that, I think. I have some French water that is very good.’

‘Aw never tasted French watter, Mrs. Frank. Is it aught like th’ watter at whom?’

‘A little sweeter, and it sparkles more—that’s all.’

‘Well, if it’s watter, aw durnd mind drinking yore and Maister Frank’s ’ealth; but it mun be watter, yo’ know.’

In a little while the carriage drew up at the door of the Hall, and old Enos, in a cold perspiration, was glad to once more feel his feet. He was, however, on the threshold of his troubles; for if the cushioned brougham overawed him, much more did the highly-furnished drawing-room into which he was ushered.

‘Aw’m noan baan i’ theer,’ said he to the servant who opened the door—‘leastways, not i’ these clogs;’ and seating himself in the hall, he took off his wooden shoon, and stood up in his stockings to enter the sacred room. No sooner was he in, however, than he shrank back from the splendour that met his gaze.

‘Where mun aw sit?’ said he.

‘Oh, sit here,’ said Mrs. Frank, pointing to a chair.

‘Nay; aw’s e break that; it wor noan shapped for th’ loike o’ me, that wernd. Aw think aw’s e stan’.’

‘Well, then, come into the dining-room,’ said she. ‘There are stronger chairs there.’ And

so saying, she took the old man across the hall to where she knew he would be more at home.

‘Well aw never!’ exclaimed Enos, as he stood before a full-length portrait in oils—‘well, aw never, if that isn’t th’ owd maister hissel.’ And tears started to his eyes. ‘Aw could fain think he wor alive. That’s just as he awlus stood i’ th’ office if he wor sayin’ aught to ony o’ ’em at had done aught wrang. He’d a wicked een, th’ owd mon had, but it were awlus full o’ kindness. Aw wish that maath o’ thine could shap’ a word or two—aw could fain like to yer thee speak agen, if it wor nobbud to swear. It’s mony a year sin’ aw yerd thee. An’ there’s th’ owd lady! Aw tell yo’ what, Mrs. Frank, yo’re a pratty un, but aw could a’ liked yo’ to seen those een when hoo first come to Heatherlow. Maister Frank favours her, but he’s noan as gradely lookin’ as his mother wor when hoo wor a lass.’ And the old man’s memory wandered in the family’s past.

Meanwhile the servants, under the orders of their mistress, had uncorked a bottle of French intage, and poured its sparkling contents into

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a jug, to be fetched in under disguise, so that Enos might drink Mrs. Frank's health in French water without any outrage to his Rechabite principles. This was brought into the dining-room, the lady herself, with mischief in her eye, pouring him out a glass and bidding him drink.

The old man raised the glass, and, looking at it, said :

'It's noan o' th' same colour as aar watter i' this country ; it's yaller like, an' it's fussin' an' o'. It's o' reight, is it, Mrs. Frank ?'

'Yes, it's all right, Enos. Come, now, drink my health.'

'Well, here's to yo' an' Maister Frank, an' to little Maister Frank, if th' Almeety 'ill be pleased to send yo' one.' And, raising the glass to his lips, the old man drank the contents. 'It's rare and good,' said he, smacking his lips. 'Aw could like to live i' France if they drink watter like that. Aar owd spring's naught to it. So that's French watter, is it? Aw think aw'll hav another soup, and drink yore health o'er agen.'

But Mrs. Frank began to be alarmed at the

joke she had thoughtlessly played, and told Enos that as he was not a Frenchman it might make him ill if he drank any more French water, asking him to have some tea with the servants in the kitchen, which invitation the old man willingly accepted.

‘Lijah,’ said Enos that night as the faithful few were coming away from the prayer-meeting at the chapel on the hill — ‘Lijah, young Maister Frank has gotten a sarvice pipe laid on to th’ Hall fro’ France.’

‘Getten a what?’

‘A sarvice pipe laid on to th’ Hall fro’ France.’

‘He wor awlus a good hond at spendin’ brass, but aw never thought he were sich a foo’ as thaa mak’s him aat to be. Arto sure?’

‘Sure! Yi ; aw supped on it this afternoon, an’ some good it were an’ o’. Bless thee, mon, aw felt twenty year younger for’t.’

‘Supped o’ what?’

‘Why, o’ French watter, forshure.’

‘An’ what were it like?’ asked Elijah.

‘Why, it wor noan th’ same colour as aar spring watter is—an’ it did a deal o’ fussin’.’

‘An’ thaa liked it, thaa sez?’

‘Yi ; it were gradely good, aw con tell thee.’

‘An’ thaa sez thaa felt better for’t? Leet i’ thi yed, aw’ll be bun’.’

‘Nowe! noan leet i’ mi yed. Aw were never leet i’ mi yed i’ mi life. Aw’ll tell thaa what, ’Lijah, hoo’s a lady, whatever else hoo is. Hoo mad’ me hav’ tea i’ th’ kitchen afoore aw come away. Maister Frank awlus knew a pratty face when he seed one.’

‘Let’s hope he’ll be happy wi’ th’ one he’s gotten.’

‘Naa, ’Lijah, aw’m noan baan to hav’ a word said agen ony o’ mi maisters. They’ve done reight by me, an’ aw’s e see ’at reight’s done by them, choose-haa. So naa thaa knows. Aw durnd know ha’ it is, but naa-a-days a chap cornd mak’ a bit o’ brass baat makin’ enemies.’

‘Thaa sees, Enos, money’s th’ root o’ all evil.’

‘But thaa tak’s good care, ’Lijah, to geet as mich as thaa con.’

‘Happen aw do, Enos. It’s a queer world.’

‘Th’ world’s reight enough ; it’s th’ folk at’s queer.’

‘Yi ; but brass breeds a deal o’ strife.’

‘For them as wants aboon their share,  
'Lijah.’

‘But thaa sees, Enos, the question is, What is their share?’

‘Him as is aboon sattles that, 'Lijah. Thaa knows He gav’ one five, another two, while t’other chap nobbud geet one, and that they took fro’ him.’

‘Aw’ll tell thaa what, Enos, that French watter’s made thee talk like a parson. Thaa’ll ha’ to soup on it agen.’

‘Aw’s’e noan be partic’lar if it comes i’ mi gate, aw con tell yo’. But thaa seems strangely put aat abaat it.’

Elijah laughed, and bade Enos good-night, and the old man turned into his cottage to feast on his porridge and milk ; and that evening, in the quiet of his chamber, on his knees, he asked God to bless ‘Maister Frank an’ his wife, an’ o’ ’at might belong to ’em’ ; and then slept as peacefully as those whose heads were pillowed on down.





# THE TRAMP WEAVER'S REVENGE.

- I. THE TRAMP WEAVER.
- II. LOVE CONQUERS ALL.
- III. TRANSFORMED.



## I.

### THE TRAMP WEAVER.

IT was raining—a cold, persistent, autumnal rain.

The clouds travelled low, and capped the moorlands with wreaths of mist, and the wind sobbed as it told the story of the year's decay. Dead leaves, those mute messengers of nature's decline, lay limp along the pathways, and the hedgerows, swept of greenery, caught the falling vapour in their thorny network and showed a myriad glistening globes of moisture, gathered and scattered at the moods of breeze and shower. The hand of desolation lay on cottage gardens, changing them into a wilderness, their flower-stalks shorn of beauty, their cups of gold and purple lying broken on the ground. The old life of the village seemed as though it were

sepulchred ; no child's voice rang along the streets, no knot of neighbours stood chatting at the cottage doors ; a pall of brooding sky hung over all, and depression dwelt in every heart and home.

Even gossip flagged in the clogger's shop. Old Iron-ears was deafer than was his wont, and the spirits of Tic-tak were run down—his wit refused to strike. As for Elijah—work kept him in countenance, for the threshold of winter found him with many calls on his trade of repairs. It was now his customers were clamorous for dry feet and warm, and his hand knew no pause in its labours.

'It's a dree (wearisome) day,' said Iron-ears.

'Yi ; a deal o' wet's fallen lately. Aw'm gettin' fair reawsty (rusty) wi' it misel'. If 'Lijah here wirnd teetotal he'd happen oil th' wheels for us a bit, ey, Iron-ears?'

'What doesto say?' asked the man whose aural organs were so unresponsive.

'Aw say, if 'Lijah here wirnd teetotal, we mut have some ale on th' job.'

'Some folk's never content wi' aught,' said

Elijah. 'Yo've gotten it wet aatside, an' naa yo' want it wet inside, an' o'.'

'Nay, lad, noan so. It's th' cowd that's aat-side, and we want summat warm to keep it aat.'

'Then yo' con go an' ax 'Senath to mak' yo' a soup o' tay.'

'There's a poor critter aatside there as luks as hoo'd do wi' a soup, an' no mistak', said Tic-tak. And, looking up, Elijah saw a forlorn woman standing in the rain before the window at which he was at work.

She was tall, with square shoulders raising in sharp angles the threadbare shawl that hung in dripping folds around them. Her face was drawn, and wore a hungry, weary look, the eyes being sunken, and set in dark rings and ablaze with the wasting fires of disease. In years she was but a girl; misfortune, however, and sorrow had played havoc with her frame, and she stood a mute picture of despair.

Elijah rose from his stool, and, going to the door, asked if he could 'do aught for her like.'

'Yi,' she said; 'aw'm witcherd (wet shod).'

'Come i'side an' let's look at 'em.'

The woman entered, and sitting down on an

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upturned box, took off her clogs, soaking as they were, pulling down her dripping skirt to hide the nakedness of her stockingless feet.

Elijah took the clogs and gave them a mute inspection. Then, throwing them aside, he said :

‘Thaa mun hav’ a pair o’ new uns.’

The woman laughed a dry and painful laugh ; then, reaching out her hand, laid hold of the worn clogs, and, putting out her bare feet, sought secretly to replace them.

‘Why, thi feet’s bleedin’, lass!’ said Elijah with some concern.

‘Not they,’ was her quick reply. And she tried to hide the pain that stung her swollen feet as she forced them into the dilapidated clogs.

‘Aw tell thee thi feet’s bleedin’. Sithee, there are marks on th’ floor where thaa’s bin sittin’.’

And it was even so—the bare soles of the woman’s feet had left blood-stains on the flag-floor of the clogger’s shop.

‘Tak’ ’em off agen, lass. Aw see they punish thee. Aw con find thee a yesier pair, and some as turns wet, an’ o’.’

The woman hesitated. Then she said :

‘Nay, aw’ll keep ’em on naa aw’ve gotten ’em on. Besides, aw’ve no brass.’

‘Nowe, thaa doesn’t favour ony. But we’re noan to a pair o’ clogs to sich like as thee. Tak’ ’em off. Aw con fettle ’em, an’ yo’ con hav’ these as a swop.’

On second thoughts the woman reseated herself and unclasped the old clogs. But their removal was more difficult than before, and, careful as she was, she peeled the surface of her feet in their tenderest part as she at last succeeded in freeing herself from their grip. She bit her lips to hide the pain, and then was caught in the toils of a choking cough.

It was now Asenath entered the shop, who, on seeing the woman sitting barefooted, made inquiries in her frank fashion as to who she was, and what was her business with the three men who stood staring round her.

‘Hoo’s ill, lass ; tak’ her an’ give her a cup o’ tay.’

‘It’s very good o’ yo’,’ said the woman ; ‘but aw mun be goin’. Let’s try those clogs yo’ swopped wi’ me for th’ owd uns.’

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‘Thaa’ll never get ’em on those feet o’ thine ; they’ll cut ’em o’ i’ pieces. They’re new uns, thaa knows,’ said Tic-tak.

‘Aw’s’e hav’ to, else go baat——’ and she forced with determinate strength the poor, lacerated feet into the stiff, new clogs that Elijah handed to her.

But the agony was more than she bargained for. Her strong self-control gave way, and she fainted.

‘That lass is going no further to-neet, ’Lijah. Yo’ chaps mun get her across to aar haase, an’ aw’ll see to her. Hoo’s somebody’s, thaa knows.’

‘Yi ; they all belong to sombry,’ was the philosophic comment of Tic-tak. ‘It’s a weary world—it is forshure.’

As soon as the woman came out of the faint she was supported by the two men to Elijah’s house, where Asenath had already gone to prepare for the sufferer’s wants. Reaching the home, they placed her beside the fire that burned for her a bright welcome, and retired, leaving the women alone.

At first the woman was silent, if not sullen,



but Asenath was not long in finding a way to her heart. Very soon the little attentions and kindnesses began to tell, and when the poor feet were bathed and bandaged, and the wet garments removed, the stranger looked into Asenath's face, and said :

‘ Aw durnd desarve thi trouble.’

‘ Thaa desarves o’ thaa’s getten, an’ more. Th’ strong, thaa knows, has to help them as is weak.’

‘ But aw’m naught to thee.’

‘ Yi, thaa art. Thaa’rt a woman, an’ aw’m one, an’ o’. Hutch up, an’ warm thisel’ ; thaa’t all on a’ dither.’

‘ There’s noan so mony o’ thi mak’ i’ this world—leastways, aw’ve noan found ’em.’

‘ Happen more than thaa thinks, lass. There’s a deal o’ human natur’.’

‘ But noan o’ yore sort.’

‘ Ne’er mind. Soup that tay, it’ll do thee good.’

As the woman drank the tea a returning life brought the flush back to her cheeks, the pallor of which so frightened Asenath, and roused the sympathy of that good woman’s heart.

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‘Hasto noabry belongin’ thee—no friends, like?’ asked Asenath.

‘If aw hav’, aw durnd know where to look for ’em,’ replied the woman.

‘What doesto do when thaa’rt a’ whom?’

‘Weyve,’ was the short rejoinder.

‘Aw thought as mich. An’ where might thi whom be?’

‘Bruntleigh.’

‘Haa is’t thaa’rt aat o’ wark?’ continued Asenath. ‘Weyvin’s noan so bad naa. There’s plenty o’ shops i’ this parish, an’ o’ raand abaat, an’ o’.’

‘Aw’m fain to yer it. Aw want wark i’ this parish, if there’s ony chonce.’

‘Thaa’s wed, aw see,’ said Asenath, pointing to the ring that loosely circled the lean finger of the woman. ‘Is thi mon dead?’

‘Nowe, worse luck!’

‘Hooisht! thaa munnot talk i’ that feshion. Wish noabry dead, thaa knows.’

‘Aw wish aw were dead misel’, but aw’s e noan die till aw’ve sattled them as makes me wish it!’

‘There’s two on ’em, then?’ asked Asenath.

The stranger nodded.

‘An’ one on ’em’s a woman, aw’ll be bun’.  
Naa, isn’t hoo?’

An angry fire gleamed in the stranger’s eye, and a spasm contracted the long throat, as though of suppressed wrath. Then, looking up at Asenath with an expression that chilled even her stout-set nerves, she said :

‘Yi, one on ’em’s a woman.’

‘An’ t’other thi maister?’ queried Asenath.

‘He used to be afoore he left me.’

‘Did he leave thee for a pretty face, then?’

‘Yi, after he’d spoiled mine.’

Asenath saw by the firelight that the speaker’s face had been once beautiful. There was a glory in the ruins which neither man’s brutality nor want’s pinch had wholly destroyed. It was a pure face, too, but a face incensed by long and silently-borne wrong, a face hungry for requital, if not revenge. And as Asenath continued to look into it, she understood how it had been spoiled, for a scar seamed the forehead, and one of the eyes was drawn as from a healed wound.

‘Ey, dear, there’s weary wark wi’ pratty faces. They’ve made mischief ever sin’ th’ world started,’ said Asenath in musing mood.

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‘Yi ; but aw’ll spoil hers afoore hoo’s done, that aw will. Hoo’ll not tak’ mi mon fro’ me for naught!’ cried the woman in wrathful tones. ‘As there’s a God aboon aw’ll be even wi’ her!’ And she shook her wasted arm at the rafters over her head.

‘Thaa munnot talk i’ that feshion, lass. Him as is aboon ’ll square off all owd scores, but He’ll tak’ His own time o’er it. He can spoil a pratty face better nor thaa con. Leave ’em, lass. Him as is aboon ’ll do reight.’

‘Aw once talked like thee,’ said the stranger. ‘Noabry prayed harder nor aw did, but it were all bobbin-windin’,\* an’ naught else.’

‘Well, if thaa’rt wise thaa’ll leave th’ Almeety to Hissel’,’ said Asenath. ‘He’s noan aboon bein’ helped, but He willn’d be meddled wi’. Thaa knows He says, “Vengeance is Mine.” Durnd thee touch what thaa’s naught to do wi’.’

‘Aw’s find ’em, onyroad, or aw’ll die o’er th’ job. Aw’ve noan so mich strength left, but aw’ll howd aat till aw’ve found ’em, choose-haa.’

‘Haa far hasto come?’ asked Asenath.

\* An expression meaning wasted labour.

‘Aw’ll tell thee mi tale, an’ then thaa’ll know all,’ said the woman.

‘Thaa’s no need to unless thaa likes, thaa knows.’

‘Aw know that, but aw con tell it thee, though it’s th’ owd tale thaa’s yerd a score o’ times. Aw were wed when aw were nobbud a lass to as daycent a felley as ever broke brade—he were a teetotal an’ o’, and went to Sundo’scoo’. But somehaa, i’ a bit, he broke th’ tone, and left off t’other. Then all began o’ goin’ wrang. He tuk to stoppin’ aat o’ neets, an’ then he started lakin’ (idling) an’ his wage were docked. He come whom one day, an’ he sez, “Mary Ann, aw’m baan to the seaside at th’ wakes.” An aw sez, “Nay, thaa’ll surely never leave me i’ th’ way aw am. Aw’ve no braas nor naught.” An’ he sez, ‘Thaa’s getten thi mother; thaa mun do th’ best thaa con.” And when th’ wakes come he left me. While he were away mi little un were born. It wor dead, poor thing! an’ a good job it wor. Th’ Lord wor merciful for once. Well, when he come back he come back wur’ nor ever. He hadn’t bin whom a week afore he struck me i’

th' face wi' his neyve (fist). There were never a blow 'at smarted as that did! It were th' first time as ever he laid hands on me. He's peyled me mony a time since, but he never hurt at after as he did that fust time. Aw con a'most feel the blow yet. Well, aw put a good face on it o', but it were no good, he got wur' and wur'. Then th' second child were born. It nobbud lived six week, an' all th' time it skrieked (cried). There were summat wrang wi' it fro' its birth. Then aw went back to th' factory; but all aw addled went to pay up his bets. But aw could ha' stood o' that, an' wur'; but when aw fun' aat he'd taken on wi' that brassen-faced hussy, th' devil come into me, an' aw've bin i' hell ever sin'. Well, things went on better an' wur' for o'er two year; but one day he left me, an' hoo wi' him.'

'An' good riddance, an' o', aw'se think,' said Asenath.

'Look yo' here. We're noan o' us saints. But her as is cornd forgive th' woman 'at tak's her husband fro' her; leastways, aw cornd, an' aw'm noan baan to try.'

'But thaa knows grace con do a deal,' remarked the good woman.

‘Happen it con,’ replied the woman, ‘where there’s no human natur’ i’ th’ job. Has a woman ever crossed th’ threshold o’ thi haase?’

‘Nowe, by Guy!’ cried Asenath, rising; ‘an’ it ’ll be ill luck for th’ first as does.’

‘Yi; aw thought as mich. Aw towd thee natur’ were stronger nor grace, didn’t aw?’

Asenath saw that in her haste she had overstepped her creed, and, sitting down, said:

‘Aw were awlus quick wi’ mi tung, but it’s th’ heart, thaa knows, an’ not th’ tung aat o’ which all th’ murders come.’

For a few minutes the women were silent. The rain lashed the windows, and the wind howled round the cottage, chasing the leaves that fell from the nursery at the rear. Now and again an importunate gust would seize the door and rattle it as though in anger at its non-admittance, and then tear off to toss the trees, or scour the moors in wrathful chase. Nightfall was nearing, chill and drear, the low-lying clouds throwing over all an early darkness which the flickering firelight in vain sought to dispel, and which the hearts of the women seemed to welcome.

‘Well, aw mun be goin’. An’ aw cornd

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thank thee enough for thi kindness,' said the stranger to Asenath.

'But thaa's nowhere to go to. An' if thaa had, thaa's naught to go wi'. Sit thee still; thaa cornd mend thisel'.'

'Yi, aw've somewhere to go, an' my legs 'll carry me. An' when aw get there th' job 'll soon be sattled. They tell me he's workin' at th' reservoir o'er th' tops yonder—and hoo's wi' him. Aw'se be even wi' 'em to-morn.'

'An' what wilto do to be even wi' 'em, lass?'

'Nay, aw cornd tell. Aw'll trust to th' chonce and see what gate oppens.'

'Onyroad, thaa's baan to stop here to-neet. So soup up that tay, and rest thee a bit afoore thaa goes to bed, an' we'll hope for a better morn an' a better mind. It fair rains an' blows to-neet, an' aw welly think there's as mich storm i'side thi heart as there is aatside this haase, isn't there?'

'Happen there is.'

'Well, we'll ax th' Almeety to send th' sun-leet aatside and in when th' mornin' comes. Sleep con lift th' claads o' th' soul, thaa knows, as neet con lift the claads o' th' sky.'



## II.

### LOVE CONQUERS ALL.

WHEN morning came the clouds had lifted. The sky was bright with an exceeding brightness. The mood of the woman, however, was still dark, and this Asenath saw as soon as she looked into the haggard and vengeful face. Sleep had failed to exorcise the demon—unrest and wrath continued to haunt the pale features.

‘Thaa’s noan slept off thi evil mind, aw see.’ said Asenath, ‘but there’s a glint o’ sunshine for thee, thaa sees ; it’s noan all dark.’

‘Not for thee, happen, but mi sun set long sin’, and aw’s never see it agen.’

‘Durnd talk i’ that feshion, lass, it’s noan reight, thaa knows. To them as is upright there’s awlus leet in th’ darkness.’

But the woman only shook her head.

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'Eat those two-thre porritch, thaa'll need 'em afoore thi journey's end, if thaa's baan to th' reservoir. Willn't hoo, 'Lijah?'

'Yi ; it's aboon ten mile, and o'er th' moors an' o'. Are thi feet yesier?'

'They durnd hurt so mich this mornin'. An' when aw con pay yo' yo's hav' th' money for th' new clogs.'

'Thaa'rt welcome to 'em if thaa nobbud minds what thaa does wi' 'em. Aw couldn't like to shoe thee for arrands o' wrath, thaa knows.'

The woman ate the porridge in silence. Then, finishing her meal, donned her shawl, throwing it over her head, and, wishing Elijah and his wife a 'good-mornin',' limped out into the roadway that led across the distant moors.

'Yon's getten a history o' her own,' said Elijah.

'Yo're reight, hoo has, poor lass! Hoo's supped sorrow i' her time, an' plenty on't. But hoo's wrang i' feightin' her own wrongs. Them sorts better i' th' hands o' th' Almeety.'

'Reight agen, 'Senath ; thaa talks like a book. They welly awlus cut theirsels as tak' th' tools aat o' His hands as is aboon.'

Both man and wife watched the girl as she climbed the distant brow. Sunshine rained on her, and birds carolled as she trod the uplands—one of those cruel moods of Nature when she mocks at man's despair.

Reaching the moors, the path she trod lost itself in the heather, and the girl paused to take her bearings. A flock of sheep, with long, jagged coats of wool, scampered past—sheep having no shepherd; and the plaintive cry of a plover, as it wheeled overhead, was carried on the breeze. In the distance, and clear in the transparency of a morning following a night of rain, stood a hut, marking the boundary of a disused quarry; and to the right a ruined chimney, the memorial of Nature's exhausted stores on this bleak fell-side. Beyond rose a mound curved like the back of a fish, rich with colour, and robed in rare autumnal beauty, from behind which curled wreaths of thin white smoke.

Deeming the vapour to point to habitation, the woman directed her steps towards this domestic beacon, but the distance was deceitful, and her sore feet found the journey jading and long. At last, however, she rounded the crown, and, looking below, saw a whitewashed

house, at the rear of which grew a cluster of stunted trees. Weary of the depression of solitude, and scared with the loneliness that so long haunted her, she quickened her steps towards its porch, glad of a respite, and eager to know the path she must take on her self-imposed journey.

Crossing the narrow garden plot, she beat with her hand on the open door, receiving by way of response a rough and unconventional 'Come in.'

It was with a timid step she entered, to find herself before a tall, masculine woman, whose face looked as though hewn in granite, so red and so strong were its features. She was bending over the fire boiling herbs, and for salute threw her head over the left shoulder, her right hand all the while stirring the iron pot. On the table stood a stone bottle, and a rich odour pervaded the kitchen and stole out in steamy wreaths, sweetening even the moorland air.

'Con yo' tell me haa fur Bellfield reservoir is fro' here?' asked the wanderer.

'Yi, it's abaat three mile and a haif. Are yo' baan that road, or summat?'

‘Aw thought o’ doin’ so,’ said the girl.

‘Then think agen, an’ geet back to where thaa come fro’, for they’ve getten smo’-pox at Bellfield, and they’re deein’ like rotten sheep. Aw’m boiling yarbs for ’em naa, poor critters! There’s noabry ’ll go near ’em.’

‘Yo’ know Bellfield, then, do yo’?’

‘Aw ought to. Mi maister’s one o’ th’ gangers there. They’re i’ a weary way, aw con tell yo’.’

‘An’ mi maister’s there an’ o’,’ said the girl, forgetting her anger now she knew her husband stood in risk.

‘An’ what were his name?’

‘Ben Porritt.’

‘Whod, does he walk with his toes in?’

‘Yi, that’s him; he were lamed when he were a lad i’ th’ factory.’

‘An’ thaa sez he’s yore maister?’

‘Aw were wed to him onyroad four year ago.’

‘Well, then, he’s oather wed again, or ought to be, for he’s getten a woman living wi’ him—a gradely-lookin’ lass hoo is, an o’—leastways hoo used to be. But hoo’s daan wi’ th’ smo’-pox naa—an’ him an’ o’, for the matter o’ that.’

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The girl threw herself down on the settle, and her pale, drawn face grew paler and more drawn.

‘Haa they it badly?’ she asked.

‘Abaat as bad as they con hav’ it. Hoo’s blind, and he’s ravin’. An’ thaa sez he’s thi felley?’

The girl nodded. Then, rising to her feet, she said: ‘Aw mun go; show me th’ quickest gate.’

‘If thaa’ll tak’ mi advice, thaa’ll go thi ways whom agen. If he’s dropped thee for another, what’s the use o’ botherin’ abaat him—and naa when hi’s getten smo’-pox an’ o’?’

‘Aw’m his wife, an’ aw’ll be where he is, dead or alive. So show me th’ gate, and look slippy abaat it.’

‘Well, yo’ see yon gap,’ said the woman, coming to the door. ‘Yo’ go thro it, and foller th’ drift-path till yo’ come to th’ first hill; and when yo’ve getten o’er that, yo’ll leet o’ Bellfield reservoir. Th’ huts they live in are on th’ funder side. But aw tell thee, if thaa’rt wise thaa’ll leave well alone.’

‘Thaa means aw’ll leave th’ ill uns to their-sels?’

‘ Yi, summat o’ that sort.’

‘ Never, when one o’ th’ ill uns belongs to me.’

‘ But he’s left thee, thaa sez.’

‘ But he’s mine for o’ that.’ And turning in the direction of the gap, she struck out with a changed heart on a changed errand.

The moods of the mind are as swift in their changefulness as those of nature. There are mental bolts from the blue, as well as the magic clearance of sullen and wrathful resolves. A few moments since this woman’s heart was dark with hatred and revenge ; now it was aglow with love and mercy.

She reached the huts within an hour of her start from the cottage where she heard the news of the epidemic. They were built in rows, long and low, many of them dilapidated and forsaken. A dread silence haunted them, and no signs of activity were near. At the adjacent reservoir the works were at a standstill, one half the men being down with the fell disease and the other half having decamped. A doctor’s gig stood about a hundred yards away from the nearest hut, and, apart from the man who held the horse,

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no human being was visible. For a minute the girl was as one dazed ; then, acting as though on sudden resolve, she walked towards the hut that lay on the opposite side of the path, and entered.

It was some little time before she grew accustomed to its darkness, and the overpowering stench brought a faintness over her long-strained nerves. Slowly, however, her eyes took in the surroundings. On three bunks lay three men, their faces purple and blotched, one of whom was giving utterance to incoherent sentences, and tossing wildly to and fro. Once or twice he made frantic efforts to rise, but was held down by the other men, on whom the disease seemed not to have laid so deadly a hold, who, when they had quieted him, returned to the rude wooden settles whereon they lay.

While she thus stood a lady in the garb of a nurse entered, who, on seeing the woman, somewhat imperatively inquired of her the business that brought her to this plague zone on the moors.

‘Aw’m seekin’ mi mon,’ she replied. ‘They say he’s daan wi’ smo’-pox, an’ aw’m come as



ought to nurse him. Con yo' tell me where aw shall find him?'

'What is his name?' asked the lady.

'Ben Porritt.'

'Ben Porritt! There's only one Ben Porritt here, and his wife is with him. You are mistaken, I think.'

The girl burst into tears, and her sobs came so quickly that at first she could not speak. Then, suppressing them, she said :

'Hoo's not his wife—aw'm his wife, an' wor wedded to him aboon four year ago. Aw know he geet tired o' me, an' tuk up wi' Molly, but aw'm his wife, an' aw mun see him and nurse him an o'.'

In a flash the lady read the poor girl's history, and, taking her by the hand, led her out of the hut. As they walked between the silent rows, she turned to her, and said :

'Then you've come to nurse the man who has forsaken you? But if you nurse him, you'll have to nurse the woman as well. They lie together in the same hut.'

The girl stopped as though suddenly smitten, and, looking in the lady's face, cried :

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‘What! nurse her as robbed me o’ mi maister?’

‘Yes, you’ll be obliged. If you will do this it will be a relief to the strain that is on me. Sister Lily and I are here alone, and the work is more than we can manage. There are twenty-three down with the disease, and we don’t know which way to turn. You may help us if you will, but if you nurse your husband you will be obliged to nurse the one that is with him. It is hard, I know, but in times like these we cannot stand on sentiment.’

The girl still stood, her features telling the story of the battle waging in her heart. Love and jealousy fought a fierce fight, and times oft jealousy was uppermost.

‘I shall have to leave you for a little while. See, I live in that hut that stands by itself. Go in, and I will come to you as soon as I can.’

‘Nurse her!’ said the girl; ‘never! They’s both dee fust!’ And she turned her steps towards the hut to which the lady had pointed. ‘But if aw could save Ben, aw would. Yi, aw’d lay daan mi life for th’ lad if hoo were nobbud aat o’ th’ gate. Poor lad! Aw wish

the Lord would tak' her an' leave Ben to me. Haa is it, aw wonder, he awlus puts summat i' aar gate?'

She entered the hut. It was spotlessly clean, and smelt as fresh as the moorlands she had so lately crossed. The rudeness of the interior was toned down by evidences of refinement and culture. A nosegay of flowers stood on the table by the side of a plate of fruit, and a Prayer-Book lay on the snow-white cloth.

The girl sat down, over-awed by the quietness and sacredness of the surroundings, and, looking along the walls, her eyes rested on a crucifix.

It was a small gilt crucifix, yet perfect in workmanship. There the Lord hung, with bent and thorn-crowned head, the arms outstretched and held by pierced hands to the cross tree of the torture frame. The long hair, clotted with the blood-drops, lay over the naked shoulders, the wasted body girded round the loins with the scant drapery which even the Roman brutality could not withhold.

'It's Jesus Christ,' said the girl to herself. 'Him as we used to sing abaat at Sundo'-schoo'.

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Aw wonder what hoo has Him hangin' there for? Happen hoo's a Catholic. Aw've never seen one o' that mak' afoore.' And she crossed the floor to look into the face of the suffering Christ.

She could not tell how it was—indeed she did not trouble to find out—but as she looked virtue seemed to pass out of the figure, and a calm stole into her heart. There was something possessing her, and it took the sting out of her jealousy, while the founts of her poisoned love began to flow sweet and clear. The memory of past wrongs died away as she had seen the mist die away before a sunrise, and she saw the suffering woman who had despoiled her as a sister, just as she saw Ben as her husband loved and forgiven. Thus she felt, as she looked in rapture on the image of the Christ.

Silently fell the footsteps of the lady as she returned towards the hut, and silently she entered, to find the girl transfixed before the crucifix. Looking on her, she made the sign of the cross, and breathed a prayer to Heaven on her behalf. Then, stepping up behind her, and touching her shoulder, she said :

‘And can you suffer, too?’

Great tears were falling down the wasted cheeks, and, looking round, she replied:

‘Aw con wi’ Him afoore me.’

‘Then you’ll nurse the girl that’s wronged you?’

‘Yi, like a mother.’

And the lady took the weary head on her shoulders, and kissed the bloodless lips, and in her breath there was healing, and in her presence a great joy.

It was not that night, however, she commenced her labour of love, for preliminaries had to be observed with clock-like precision. The girl was made to sit down to a plain meal, and many were the instructions she received. The two ladies found her quick to take all the hints they offered, and before they saw her to sleep they were thankful for the aid so unforeseenly sent them. Ben Porritt’s was a malignant case, and that morning the doctor had looked somewhat hopelessly at him, while he held out but a faint chance for the recovery of the woman. He had stated that with careful nursing they

might pull round, but with only two pairs of hands what more could be done?

That night, as the girl slept, the disease ran riot in many a hut, while the nurses, sleepless and vigilant, moved from bed to bed. Strong men breathed their last, forbidding and repulsive in their death-stare, and the Sisters, quietly and unaided, carried in the wooden shells, and lay therein the rotting forms of those who but a few days before were stalwart men. It was the revel of disease in its most loathsome form—a revel all the more fearful because of the silence of the great moors on which it sported, and because of the darkness of the night. And those who fought with it were frail women; and those who watched, the silent, relentless stars. But in the hut hung the form of that Incarnate Sufferer whose spirit fed the fount of woman's love, and stayed the arm of woman's service. Nor were there wanting those among the sufferers who listened from the Sisters' lips to the story that the little crucifix so mutely, yet so eloquently, told.

### III.

#### TRANSFORMED.

THEY were dreary days the Sisters spent in companionship with disease on the lonely Bellfield Moors. Not that time could be said to hang heavily on their hands—they were too busy for that. But to look ever into the same scarred faces, save when they looked into their own, blanched and worn; to hear the same delirious and piteous voices—this was wearing even to nerves fortified to the task. Then the rains, so depressing in their continuous fall, beating down the tawny herbage, and playing their ceaseless tattoo on the felt-covered roofs of the huts; and the wind, never weary of dirge and sob—no wonder there were hours when the Sisters, almost driven to madness, sought the glory and inspiration of the little crucifix that hung on the whitewashed wall of their room.

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And the girl-wife, with her story of wrong, she, too, felt the leaden hours, and put up many a prayer for strength and patience to Him who in His hour of darkness wondered why His Father's face was veiled.

It was the early hour of morning, when the chill defies the warmest hearth, and lays its hand on strongest hope and resolve. Ben slept, but his paramour lay tossing in wild delirium. Again and again the watchful wife drew the thin sheet over the restless girl ; then, weary of what seemed a useless task, she sat down and brooded over her wrongs. Before her, in the flicker of the night-light, she saw the outlines of her rival's coarse type of beauty. There was the rounded shoulder, and the full-orbed bosom, tempestuously troubled with the quick-beating pulse ; and the face, with its ripe lips and rounded cheeks, spotted with the fell disease. Looking on this, she thought of her past prayer for its spoliation, and shuddered as she saw the prayer answered. Then, turning to the little time-piece the Sister left with her, she read the approach of the hour for the administration of the cordial with which science sought to stem the tide of death. How much



depended on its observance she well knew, for the Sisters had warned her that if she slept or overlooked it, the end would draw apace. In the gloom the evil heart once more awoke. The spirit of hate which she supposed the crucifix had conquered again came forth from the dry places wherein it had wandered, and brought with it spirits more evil than itself. Ben was recovering—her Ben—hers once by love, and hers by right for ever. Whose would he be when the tide of life restored him? Would he cling to this strange woman—or would he return to his first love? True, the girl's beauty was gone. She had prayed for that. But there was fascination other than beauty—the fascination of the will, which she knew so well this temptress possessed. The chances were against her. Ben had already recognised her, and, as she thought, softened somewhat towards her, though few words had been spoken between them. But the future was uncertain. If the girl lived all chances of reunion would end. Why should she live? What claim had she on life—or on her, Ben's lawful wife, who at that moment was the minister of her life? Might she not, as nurse,

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feign sleep, or withhold the draught? Then her rival would die and Ben be hers for ever! It was a dread moment, and the poor wife's spent nerves trembled beneath its strain.

Once more her eyes caught the timepiece, and in the dim light she saw the fingers were within five minutes of the fateful hour. A moment's hesitation, and her resolve was made — she would sleep.

But she could not. As the little monitor beat she found herself counting its feeble ticks. Twenty, twenty-five, thirty, and then her memory lost all power of calculation. She recommenced, again to lose. At last she opened her eyes. Surely the hour was passed! but looking, she found to her dismay but two and a half minutes were sped. What an eternity in those moments!

Again she closed her eyes. On beat the watch, relentless in the destinies it was sealing. With mute lips she muttered to herself the passage of the flying seconds, only to lose them in her throbbing brain. Then she ventured another glance at the tiny dial, to find it yet a minute to the fatal hour.

Another struggle to close those watchers

which she knew God pleaded with her to keep open. The power was gone, her eyes were held waking. Against her will she looked, now into the face of her despoiled rival, and then at the face of the warning watch.

She saw the girl was dosing. There she lay, uncovered, in the glory of womanhood, in the loathsomeness of disease. Was it not her duty to awaken her and administer the draught?

Then she looked at Ben—her own Ben. And there passed before her the vision of a cottage in a nook of greenery, and of a fireside where comfort and love were wont to dwell. She dreamed it might be hers again, yet not if the woman lived whose life she now held in her hands. Then she saw a dead baby, a tiny one, whose breath was never drawn, dead from its birth, and by its side another, ‘clemmed’ and puny, and the hand that slew them lay there, helpless, by her side. Yes, blood cried for blood, and love must be avenged of its wrongs.

She lifted her eyes to the wall ; some spiritual magnetism lifted them ; and there she saw the crucifix—the same bowed head, with its thorny crown, the same long hair, with its gouts of blood, the same outstretched pierced hands.

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And there came, too, the same voice: 'Can you suffer?'

Then the full tide of that life swept through her, and, rising, she filled the phial, and without a falter placed it to the sick girl's mouth.

'Here, Molly, sup thi medicine.'

The girl turned restlessly, allowing the liquid to pass between her lips, and fell off into a broken slumber. Then the watcher looked round for the crucifix, but it was gone. A great light, however, shone in its place, and in the glow she stood transformed.

In a little while Ben opened his eyes, and in the dawning of a new consciousness—the consciousness of returning health—saw before him the two women who between them had divided the passions of his life.

'Is hoo dead?' asked he of his wife.

The woman shook her head, and bade him be silent lest he should disturb the crisis hour of the sleeper.

'Hoo's naught to thee. Hoo's done naught but wrang thee. What for doesto bother wi' her?'

'Hoo's like thee, isn't hoo? Hoo's sick an' needs tentin.'

‘If hoo dees, willto hav’ me agen, lass?’

Coldly and cruelly the words fell on the woman’s heart. She heard in them selfishness, and the love awakened in her by the crucifix began to wane.

‘Hoo’ll live,’ said the woman. ‘Aw ve sin her thro’ th’ worst.’

‘What! yo’ve nursed her? and for me, an o’? There were awlus summat abaat yo’ aw could never reckon up. What for didto come to me?’

‘Thaa were mi husband, wernd ta?’

‘Yi, but aw left thee. Didto come to nurse me?’

‘Nowe.’

‘What then?’

‘Aw come to spoil thi little game an’ hers.’

‘An’ thaa fun sombry else had done it for thee?’

The woman nodded, and then continued :

‘But aw thought as aw’d stop an’ see yo’ both through it, an’ aw hav’. As soon as hoo’s on th’ mend aw’s leave yo’ both for mi looms. Aw’ll noan be i’ yore gate.’ But as she was talking the man slept.

As the dawn broke across the moors—broke

in sweeping sheets of rain, and low, chasing leaden clouds—one of the Sisters visited the sick hut where the wife kept watch over the two sleepers. Passing to the bedside of the girl, she looked long and anxiously at her ; then, turning to the woman, she said :

‘ You gave her the medicine?’

‘ Yi,’ was the reply, ‘ aw’ve done o’ as yo’ towd me.’

‘ And at the time?’

‘ Yi, to th’ minute ; an’ hoo’s slumbered on an’ off ever sin’.

The Sister again looked at the girl, this time with a keener scrutiny. Then she left the hut, returning with the other lady who divided with her the labours on these disease-haunted heights.

‘ What do you think of her, nurse?’

‘ She is dying, poor thing! It will all be over in a little while. I don’t think she will waken from her unconsciousness.’

‘ Dying!’ cried the woman in a tone of terror.

‘ Yes,’ said the sister. ‘ You are sure you gave her the medicine? You did not sleep, did you?’

‘ Nowe ; hoo had th’ medicine to th’ tic-tak by that watch o’ yours.’

‘ Two o’clock?’

‘Yi, two o’clock to th’ second. An’ yo’ say hoo’s deein’?’

‘Yes.’

The three women stood round the bed—the Sisters on each side, the woman at the foot, with her long score of wrongs well-nigh avenged. None of them spoke; Death was left in silence to do his worst, nor was he long about the business. A few heavily-drawn breaths, a faint rattle breaking the stillness of the dread moment, a vibration of the frame as though under the shock of some unseen hand, and the poor idol of man’s lust was beyond the reach of the spoiler. Then the Sisters, unaided, carried a wooden shell into the hut, wherein they placed the corpse; and, breathing a prayer for the soul of the departed, they left her in the dead-house to beating rain and wind.

The weeks passed—long weeks of rain and cloud. Elijah toiled on at his clogs, listening to the rude philosophy of Iron-ears and Tic-tak, and talking over at evening with Asenath the news of the day. The fall of the year was telling its tale on the old clogger—his breath came more heavily, and his stoop was more

marked, and once or twice he remarked to his wife that his days were numbered. She, poor woman, knew this already, but hid her fears, always carrying a cheerful mind. She meant to be 'game,' as she called it, and cheered the old man with her words and countenance. To her, life had been no make-believe ; but a brave spirit upheld her ; and, as she said years before, 'she meant to fiddle th' tune through to th' end.'

They were sitting by the fireside, Elijah sorely plagued with his cough, while Asenath's busy fingers clicked the steel needles with which she knit the hose for winter's wear. Her good man was dosing, and she watched the worn face as it hung on the shrunken chest, and lived over again the toils and sorrows of the past. Then she laid her knitting on her knees and looked into the fire. In the glowing embers were the pictures of their yesterdays. Many a face shone in the flame, and the sinking coals built themselves into scenes that had been, then crumbled into ash, and left her memory gray with the irrevocable past.

Elijah awoke, and for a moment lay in the spasm of his prophetic cough. Then, turning to his wife, he said :



‘Aw never towd thee, ’Senath, did aw?’

‘Towd me what?’

‘Why, abaat th’ tramp weyver—her as we gav’ those clogs to six week sin’. Yo’ know, her as yo’ took in for th’ neet.’

‘Do yo’ mean her as was seekin’ her felley over at Bellfield?’

‘Yi, th’ very same. Hoo come wi’ him to-day to th’ shop whol yo’ were aat. An’ hoo paid me for th’ clogs an’ o’.’

‘Thaa never sez so!’

‘Yi, it’s God’s truth. An’ aw’d a long talk wi’ ’em. He’s gone back wi’ her whom.’

‘An’ where did hoo find him?’

‘At Bellfield, daan wi’ th’ smo’-pox. An’ hoo nursed him raand.’

‘An’ what abaat t’other woman?’ inquired Asenath.

‘Aw never thought to ax her.’

‘That’s a mon all o’er, ’Lijah. Just th’ thing aw wanted to know abaat. An’ haa did hoo look?’

‘Hoo looked gradely weel—a deal better nor hoo did when hoo come to us that neet.’

‘An’ where wor they baan? Did hoo say?’

‘Yi; hoo said they wor baan back to th’ owd whom. And they seemed fain an’ set up wi’ one another, an’ o’.’

‘An’ what were he like?’

‘Oh, a shapless sort o’ a chap. Aw mad’ naught mich on him. He wouldn’t come inside th’ shop.’

‘But aw would like to know abaat that t’other woman as he went away wi’. Arto sure hoo said naught abaat her?’

‘Sure, lass—not a word.’

‘Well, what did hoo say abaat other things like? Did hoo say aught abaat me?’

‘Yi; hoo said as hoo owed all to thee for thi care that neet, and what thaa said to her abaat her evil mind.’

‘Then there’s summat at th’ back as yo’ve nod gotten at. Hoo meant mischief when hoo started for Bellfield. If ever aw seed murder i’ onybody’s een, it were i’ hers that mornin’, an’ no mistak’. An’ thaa sez thaa never axed her abaat t’other woman?’

‘Nowe, lass, aw’ve tow’d thee twice. Cornd ta be satisfied?’

‘Ey, ’Lijah, thaa’rt as gawmless as ever thaa wor. Just fancy, naa, never axing abaat th’

woman hoo said hoo were after. Did hoo say aught else?’

‘Yi ; hoo said hoo wor goin’ back to her looms—an’ Ben an’ o.’

‘An’ who wor Ben?’

‘Why, her husband, forshure. Who didto think he wor?’

‘An’ yo’ say he wor nobbud shapless.’

‘That wor o’. He looked like one o’ those chaps as had sopped enough ale to float a mon o’ war.’

‘Well, aw wonder th’ lass ever took to him agen. If thaa ever left me, ’Lijah, thaa’d ha’ to leave me fo’ good. Aw’d never look at thee agen.’

‘Never’s a long time, lass, thaa knows.’

‘So it is, but nod too long for a chap as leaves his wife for ony hussey as comes across his gate.’

‘Well, hoo’s taken to him agen, thaa sees. And hoo looked a deal better o’er the job than hoo did afore.’

‘’Lijah, there’s some women as is foo’s. They’ll put up wi’ aught if it’s fro’ a felley. Yo’ can pike ’em up when yo’ plez, and put ’em daan when yo’ plez ; it’s o’ reight if it’s a felley

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as is doin' it. But aw'm noan o' that mak' misel'.  
Aw never believed i' makin' misel' chep.'

'Thaa sees, lass, thaa's never bin tried.  
Thaa's awlus bin th' apple o' mi een.'

'Thaa's never sin onybody better yet, 'Lijah.'

'Nowe, lass, an' aw durnd think aw ever shall.'

'When thaa does thaa knows thaa's nobbud  
to speak.'

'An' thaa'll stan aside, doesto mean?'

'Yi; but it'll be for good an' o', thaa knows.'

'Ey! bless thee, thaa's o'most too owd to kiss  
—leastways aw am. But come, we'll be lad and  
lass for once.'

'Nay, 'Lijah; thaa fair mak's me blush; thaa'rt  
welly gettin' past courtin'. But aw could ha'  
liked to ha' yerd summat abaat that t'other  
woman. Aw feel fair ill off as yo' didn't ax.  
We'se never know naught naa.'

'Senath, thaa wor awlus a gradely woman,  
an' thaa'll dee one. Aw welly think thaa toots  
(prys) as mich as thaa did when thaa fun aat who  
aw wor—when aw axed thee to wed me.'

'Yi; an' aw'll find aat where t'other woman is  
yet, 'Lijah, see if aw durnd!'

But that secret was in the graveyard on the  
distant moors.

TAKING DOWN THE SIGN.



## TAKING DOWN THE SIGN.

IRON-EARS and Tic-tak were watching Elijah at his work, but there was little life in their conversation. Not that they were without news—only the news with which they were furnished was sad and depressing, even to stalwart-minded men like themselves. At best they were all superstitious ; and, as with all superstitious people, death was not congenial when it came nigh them suddenly and in tragic form. There is that in the common mind that always trembles in presence of an epidemic ; the vulgar imagination not only clothes the terror in more fearful garb, but multiplies its ravages until the reserve force of nerve is destroyed. There is something haunting in the question, ‘ Who next ? ’ and the individual recoils as he answers according to the calculation of probabilities. It was

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this question that haunted the men in the clogger's shop. Mutely they asked, and mutely they answered it. This it was that silenced them and surrounded them with gloom. They were in the presence of a dread disease.

'It tak's 'em fearful sudden like,' said Iron-ears. 'Sim o' Tom's were nobbud daan wi' it two days an' a neet, an' aw'd hav' taken a lease o' his life.'

'An' it tak's 'em all at once, an' o'. All th' haase is down wi' it at Sam Coupe's, an' there's nine on 'em when yo' reckon 'em up,' continued Tic-tak.

'It's that as follows it aw'm flayed on,' commented Elijah. 'Newmony (pneumonia), durnd they co' it? It mak's terrible quick work wi' 'em. Aw yer th' doctor's daan wi' it.'

'An' th' parson.'

'Yi ; an' Maister Frank up at th' Hall.'

'It fairly laughs at larnin' an' brass, doesn'd it?'

'Ey?' interrogated Iron-ears.

'Aw say it fairly laughs at larnin' and brass.'

'Who laughs at larnin' and brass?' interrogated the deaf man.



‘Why, the influenza, forshure—it as we’re talkin’ abaat.’

‘It’s no respecter o’ persons,’ said Iron-ears, with the solemnity of fear in his tones. ‘They con keep th’ fayver daan i’ th’ village, and rheumatis to them as geets wet an’ cornd dry theirsels—but this mak’ axes noabry.’

‘Doesto think it’s a visitation, ’Lijah?’ asked Tic-tak.

‘Ey, lad, aw gien o’er talkin’ abaat visitations sin’ aar little Sam’l were lamed.’

‘Well, aw suppose we mun all dee sometime, but aw’d rayther dee i’ a gradely feshion nor as th’ folks is deein’ all raand.’

‘What do yo’ call a gradely feshion, Iron-ears?’ asked Tic-tak.

‘Why, aw could like to tak’ mi time o’er it, and tak’ it yesy (easy), like. Nod be i’ a hurry o’er th’ job, thaa knows.’

‘Yi; aw know what thaa means.’

‘But aw suppose th’ owd leveller ’ll go his own gate.’

‘It fair mak’s me flayed to see so mony berry-in’s. There were seven yesterdo, and there’s baan to be five to-day,’ said Elijah.

‘Didto yer o’er owd Naybour deein’, and what he said to th’ misses?’

‘Nay, aw never yerd.’

‘Why, just afore he deed he said, “Misses, aw want thee to mak’ me a promise.” “What is it?” hoo said. “Wilto mak’ it?” says he. “Not afore aw yer it,” hoo said. Then th’ owd chap turned hissels’ o’er, an’ sobbed, “It’s nobbud this : wilto see there’s currant brade an’ slow walkin’ at mi berryin’?” Then hoo said so mony folks were deein’ as there’d be no time for slow walkin’, but hoo promised to bake a bit o’ currant brade for th’ owd chap, an’ hoo did.’

‘Yi, they’d a gradely funeral tay for him, an’ o’, an’ he desarved it. He wor a daycent felley, were Naybour.’

‘He wor, ’Lijah ; we could do wi’ a two-three more o’ th’ same breed.’

‘Aw’ll tell yo’ whad, lads, aw’s nod be so long after him,’ said Elijah. ‘Aw’m noan well. Aw feel as though aw’d getten a clogger’s shop i’ mi yed, an’ some hommerin’ an’ o’.’ And he pressed his hand to his forehead and paused in his work.

‘Thaa’ll pool raand, ‘Lijah, if thaa has gotten it. Thaa mun keep up, thaa knows, lad. A good sperit is half th’ battle when yo’re ill.’

Elijah toiled on at his clog, but under the thraldom of a great weariness. There was a burning sensation at his throat as though a heated wire was being drawn down it, and the hammering in his forehead became incessant. Suddenly a chill would seize him, and now and again so severe would be the pain in his back that more than once he thought he was run through with a knife. At one moment he felt the shop a furnace, so hot was he ; then the temperature seemed suddenly to fall, and he was seized with rigours.

‘Aw’s e be like to give up to it, lads,’ said Elijah. Then he took the clog from his knee, and, looking at it fondly, continued : ‘Nay, but aw’ll finish thee to-neet. Thaa’s badly wanted, an’ aw promised thee ;’ and, so saying, he returned to his toil.

Iron-ears and Tic-tak remained in the shop, occasionally speaking in monosyllables, but for the most part silent.

Two hands were busy—the hand of the

craftsman and the hand of the destroyer. One hand was tired, and fast losing its cunning ; the other was wielded by one who fainted not, nor grew weary. Feebler and fewer came the blows of the former, while those of disease fell faster and with more fatal force. Doing and undoing ran side by side, but the odds were in favour of the foe. Iron, wood and leather were in the shaping, flesh and blood were falling a prey to death. Bravely Elijah fought with the over-mastering plague, and the watchers were illiterate men.

‘ Put th’ clog daan, lad, an’ go whom.’

‘ Yi ; we’ll see thee across to th’ owd woman,’ said Tic-tak, with a huskiness in his throat.

‘ Aw’ve never left a job unfinished yet, lads, an’ aw’m noan baan to.’ But the hand grew more unsteady, and once or twice there were slips in the use of the tools.

‘ Aw see thaa’ll dee gam’, ‘Lijah,’ said Iron-ears.

‘ Better nor deein’ soft, isn’t it? But aw’ll soon hav’ it finished naa.’

In a little while the clog lay on the workman’s knee, completed. Then he took it up in

his hand, rubbing it carefully with his apron, and eyeing it with pride. Satisfied with the inspection, he placed it on the counter, and, turning to the two bystanders, said :

‘ There, naa, it’s done ; aw con go whom i’ peace. It’s th’ last clog as aw shall ever sweat o’er, an’ it’s noan as well finished as aw could ha’ liked it to be. But aw’m nod ashamed on’t. ’Lijah Holt never made a poor clog, lads ; choose what else he’s done, he’s kept folk fro’ being witcherd (wetshod). Tic-tak, put aat th’ leet and bring th’ key wi’ thee across whom.’

But Elijah could not rise from his stool, and before the men lowered the light they carried him over to his house a smitten man.

The doctor stood by the window, and, drawing aside the curtain, scanned with a careful eye the clinical thermometer which he held up steadily to the light.

‘ One hundred and five,’ said he *sotto voce*. ‘ Humph ! and a falling pulse. It’s U P.’

‘ Didto speyk, doctor ?’ asked Asenath in an anxious manner.

‘ No,’ was the cool reply.

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There was a drawn expression on the flushed face of the sick man, and painfully-drawn breaths contracted his chest. His fingers ceaselessly played on the folds of the sheet, and but brief moments of lucidity gleamed like rifts in a sombre and stormy day of clouds.

‘Fumblin’ th’ bed-clothes is a bad sign, doctor. Aw never knew ony as did it as ever geet aat o’ bed agen. It’s th’ beginnin’ o’ th’ end, yo’ know. They’ve gotten into th’ dark, an’ beginnin’ to feel their way like.’

‘I wish that were the only bad symptom,’ said the doctor. ‘It’s the rising temperature and the falling pulse I don’t like.’

‘What’s them, doctor?’

‘Why, you see, the fever is increasing, and the heart’s action is failing. That must alter soon, or——’

‘He’ll die?’

‘Yes, that is the conclusion.’

This conversation was carried on at the top of the stairway leading down from the chamber in which Elijah was muttering in semi-delirium. As soon as it was over, and the man of science had gone, Asenath came up to her husband,

and, like one of old, laid her hands on him, but no healing came from the touch.

‘Lijah!’

The voice recalled him, and he opened his eyes, and for a moment the fire of fever gave way before the fire of old affection and love.

‘Is it ‘Senath?’ he asked.

‘Yi. Thaa’rt nobbud poorly, lad ; wouldta like onybody to mak’ a prayer o’er thee?’

‘What mun they pray o’er me for? Aw’ve no jobs ‘at want sattlin’ as aw know on. Aw towd thee forty year sin’ ‘at when aw come to dee there wor two chaps as aw shouldn’t want i’ th’ gate, an’ them’s th’ parson an’ th’ lawyer.’

The woman recalled Elijah’s long past expression, and knew in her heart that he had so lived as to need neither.

‘Wouldta like me to send for owd Enos? Aw could like thee to see him.’

‘Then send for him, lass, if it’s thi plezer.’

The sick man relapsed into the maze and confusion that peopled his brain, and wandered, lost amid the fever’s fancies, while broken sentences incoherent and strange fell from his lips :

‘Noabry were ever witcherd wi’ mi clogs. . . .

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Aw were awlus more pertic'lar abaat keepin' folk feet dry nor pocketin' their brass. . . . If aw could do naught else, aw could mak' a clog. . . . Aw could never mak' a prayer as owd Enos could, but aw could mak' a clog—aw could, forshure.'

Then a fitful slumber passed over him, and he closed his eyes. Asenath grew more hopeful, but it was short-lived. In a few minutes the rambling recommenced :

'Aw finished off th' clog. . . . Stan' aat o' mi leet, Iron-ears. Thaa could awlus be deaf when it suited thi. . . . And thee, Tic-tak, what hasto fresh? Aw'll tell thee what, it's gettin' dark. Leet up, owd lad.'

Enos now entered the room, bent with age, his face radiant with what, in the language of his sect, he called his 'living hope.'

Walking up to the sick man, and taking his hand, he said :

'Lijah, is it well wi' thi soul?'

Elijah looked at him. Then asked :

'Has them clogs goan to Molly Greenwood's?'

'It's time thaa left clogs alone, lad, naa thaa's



come to th' valley. They durnd want shoon, thaa knows, where thaa's baan.'

There was a lucid moment, and Elijah turned towards Enos.

'Sithee, aw'se look after mi bisness as long as aw con. Them's fittest for th' next world as does their duty best i' this. Has them clogs goan to Molly Greenwood's? Doesto yer, Asenath?'

'Hooisht, 'Lijah,' said the woman. 'Keep thisel' quiet, do, that's a good lad;' and she soothed him, drawing her cool hand across the hot and aching head.

'Th' rulin' passion strong i' death, thaa sees, 'Senath. 'Lijah 'll noan be reight baat he con shap' a clog when he gets to t'other side—aw'll war'nd he won't.'

'An' thaa'll want to do a bit o' prayin', Enos, or thaa'l noan be content.'

'There's no stanin' agen a woman's wit; leastways, there isn't agen thine, Asenath. But sithee, he's openin' his een agen. What is't, 'Lijah?'

Elijah raised himself in bed, and looked as though intent on catching some distant sound.

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‘Yer thee?’ said he. ‘Cornd yo’ yer it?’

‘Yer what?’ asked his wife.

‘Why, th’ owd songster as used to sing i’ th’ cage for little Sam’l.’

‘Nowe, aw con yer naught. Con yo’, Enos?’ said the now startled woman, turning to the old man.

‘Nowe ; there’s naught as aw yer.’

‘Yer thee?’ again cried Elijah. ‘That were grand! Aw’ve never yerd th’ bird sin’ little Sam’l set it off th’ neet he deed. Open th’ window, lass, and let it in. Aw’ve never yerd sich music afoore.’

‘He’s ramblin!’ whispered Enos to Asenath.

‘He’s noan ramblin’, lad, he’s gettin his new yers (ears)—th’ resurrection yers, yo’ know. Yo’ con yer th’ Song o’ Moses an’ th’ Lamb in them. ’Lijah, hasn’t a one word for me?’

‘Yer thee, lass ; it’s noan th’ bird naa. It’s aar little Sam’l ; aw con fair yer him treblin’ it. Its grond !’

‘What’s he singin’ abaat, lad?’ asked Enos.

But Elijah had closed his eyes. The weary hand that had shaped so many clogs lay still, and the poor heart, whose inner life had been

one of silent suffering, was now, for ever, at rest.

With Elijah's decease the local life of the village shifted to another centre, and the shop became tenantless. In a little while it was re-tenanted by a gay young milliner, who stripped the walls and decked the windows with head-gear of latest fashions in the stead of clogs, ribbons and feathers taking the place of leather and laces, and the merry voices of vain girls, talking over finery, sounding where the elders had been wont to talk in solemn tones, and crack their hard and sometimes over-personal jokes.

When the sign was taken down from over the old shop-door the village turned out in sad and sorrowful mood. Many tears were shed, and by strong men, too. Dick Carpenter, the joiner, who was called on to do the work, was as nervous as an executioner over his first job. It was with a trembling hand he reared his ladder, and with an uncertain foot he climbed its staves. Raising his arms to unhasp the wooden shoon from its iron stays, he looked down at

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the crowd, and, with a voice thick with emotion, said :

‘ D——n it, lads, aw cornd !’

But what he could not do a kindly gust of March wind did for him, and the next moment *The Sign of the Wooden Shoon* fell among the crowd below.

THE END.



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